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THE APPLAUSE ACTING SERIES

ENVIRONMENTAL THEATER

***An Expanded New Edition
including "Six Axioms For
Environmental Theater"***

Richard Schechner



ZHdK-MIZ (Zürich)

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An Applause Original
Environmental Theater By Richard Schechner
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1967, revised 1987

The theatrical event includes audience, performers, scenario or dramatic text (in most cases), performance text, sensory stimuli, architectural enclosure or some kind of spatial demarcation, production equipment, technicians, and house personnel (when used). It ranges from non-matrixed performances¹ to orthodox mainstream theater, from chance events and intermedia to "the production of plays." A continuum of theatrical events blends one form into the next:

"Impure," life "Pure," art

public events, ↔ intermedia ↔ environmental ↔ orthodox
demonstrations happenings theater theater

It is because I wish to include this entire range in my definition of theater that traditional distinctions between art and life no longer apply. All along the continuum there are overlaps; and within it—say between an orthodox production of *Hamlet* and the October 1966 March on the Pentagon or Allan Kaprow's *Self-Service*²—there are contradictions. Aesthetics is built on systems of interaction and transformation, on the ability of coherent wholes to include contradictory parts. In the words of New York city planner Richard Weinstein, "competing independent systems within the same aesthetic frame." Kaprow might even take a more radical position, doing away altogether with the frame (see his "The Real Experiment," 1983), or accepting a variety of frames depending on the perspectives of the performers and spectators.

Surely the frames may change during a single performance, transforming an event into something unlike what it started out being. The end of *Iphegenia Transformed* (1966) at the Firehouse Theatre had Euripides' *dea ex machina* lowered onto stage bringing with her four

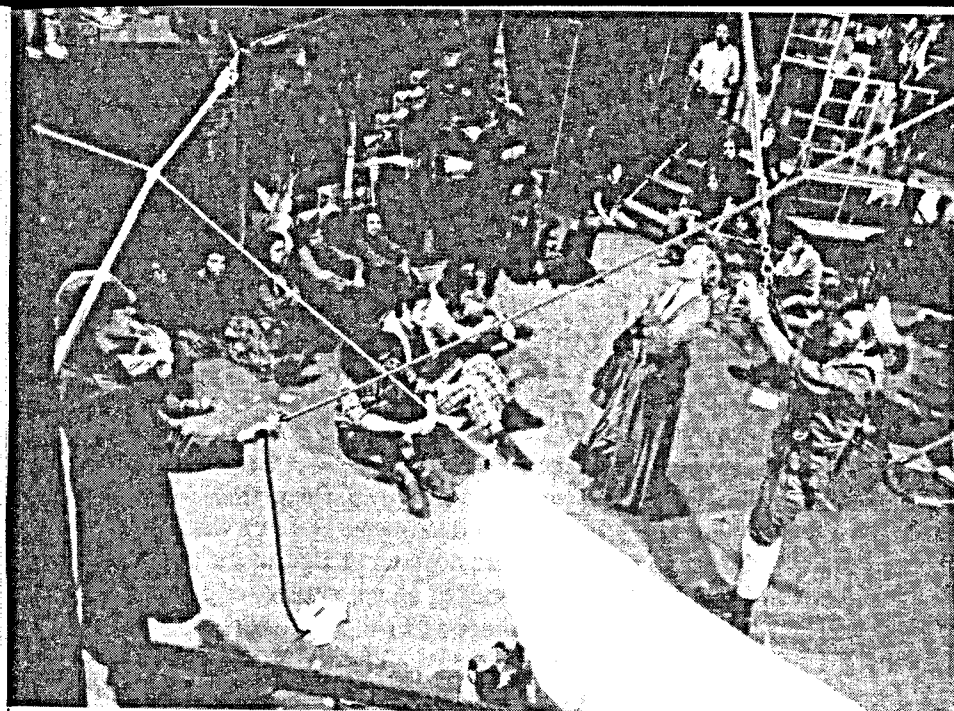
cases of beer. The marriage ceremony that concludes *Iphegenia at Aulis* was followed by a celebration that included the entire audience—the party lasted several hours. Years later, in his production of *The Trojan Women*, Suzuki Tadashi, the Japanese director of experimental theater, ended the play with an onstage actors-only supper of Big Macs. In my 1973 production with The Performance Group of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, scene 3—the death of Swiss Cheese—was followed immediately by a supper served to the spectators.

The theatrical event is a complex social interweave, a network of expectations and obligations.³ The exchange of stimuli—either sensory or cognitive or both—is the root of theater. What it is that separates theater from more ordinary exchanges—say a simple conversation or a party—is difficult to pinpoint formally. One might say that theater is more regulated, following a script or a scenario; that it has been rehearsed. Kirby would probably argue that theater presents the self in a more defined way than usual social encounters. Grotowski has said that the theater is a meeting place between a traditional text and a troupe of performers.

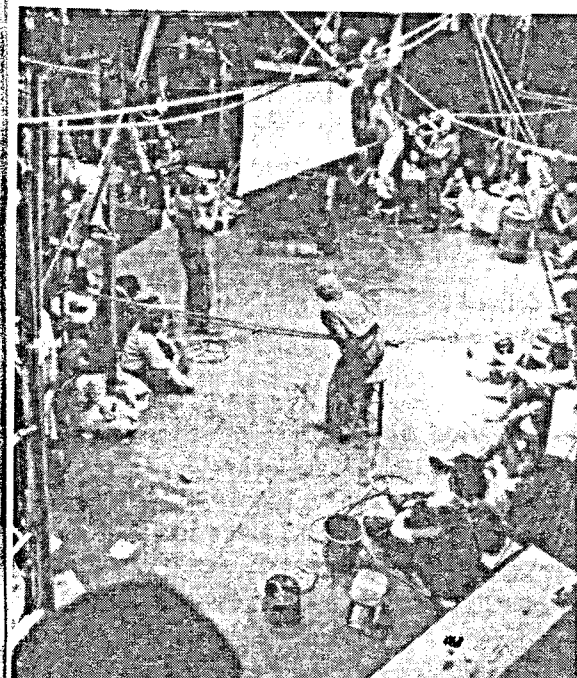
I didn't do Wyspianski's *Akropolis*, I met it. [...] One structures the montage so that this confrontation can take place. We eliminate those parts of the text which have no importance for us, those parts with which we can neither agree nor disagree. [...] We did not want to write a new play, we wished to confront ourselves (1968a: 44).

Indeed, confrontation is what makes current American political activity theatrical. To meet Bull Connor's dogs in Birmingham or LBJ's troops at the Pentagon is more than a showdown in the Wild West tradition. In the movies, everything would be settled by the showdown. In the political demonstrations, contrasts are heightened, nothing resolved. A long series of confrontations is necessary to actuate change. The streets of Birmingham and the steps of the Pentagon are visible boundaries, special places of special turbulence, where sharply opposed styles are acted out by both sides. At the Pentagon, stiff ranks and files of troops confronted snake-dancing protesters; in Birmingham hand-holding civil rights activists marched peaceably into the snarling dogs and twisting fire-hoses barely held under control by the police. Grotowski's personal confrontation is converted into a social confrontation. Out of such situations, slowly and unevenly, guerrilla and street theater emerge, just as out of the confrontation between medieval ceremony and Renaissance tumult emerged the Elizabethan theater.

John Cage has offered an inclusive definition of theater:



Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1975), scene three. Courage says she doesn't know Swiss Cheese who is under arrest. Note how the spectators are scattered around The Performing Garage environment, designed by James Clayburgh. (Richard Schechner)



Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1975), scene three, in The Performing Garage. As Courage watches, Swiss Cheese is hoisted aloft, where he will remain until executed. (Richard Schechner)

I would simply say that theater is something which engages both the eye and the ear. The two public senses are seeing and hearing; the senses of taste, touch, and odor are more proper to intimate, non-public, situations. The reason I want to make my definition of theater that simple is so that one could view everyday life itself as theater. [...] I think of theater as an occasion involving any number of people, but not just one (1965: 50-51).

Cage's definition is probably too restrictive. Performance artists have made pieces involving the "intimate senses." And there are performances involving only one person. In the New Orleans Group's 1967 production of Eugene Ionesco's *Victims of Duty*, three "private" senses were stimulated. During a seduction scene perfume was released in the room; frequently the performers communicated to the spectators by means of touch. At the very end of the show, chunks of bread were forcefully administered to the audience by the performers, expanding the final cruel gesture of Ionesco's play. Of course, the Bread and Puppet Theatre concludes all its performances with the sharing of home-baked bread.

In situations where descriptive definitions are so open as to be inoperative as excluding criteria, one must seek *relational* definitions. Taking a relational view makes it possible to understand theater as something more inclusive than the staging of literature, acting, and directing. It is possible to integrate into a single system works as diverse as *Self-Service* and Tyrone Guthrie's *Oresteia*. Goffman's assertions regarding social organization are broader even than Cage's and go right to the heart of the theatrical event:

[...] any [...] element of social life [...] exhibits sanctioned orderliness arising from obligations fulfilled and expectations realized (1961: 19).

Briefly, a social order may be defined as the consequence of any set of moral norms [rules] that regulate the way in which persons pursue objectives (1963: 8).

The nature of the expectation-obligation network and specific sets of rules vary widely depending on the particular performance.

Returning to the continuum, at the left end are loosely organized street events—the 1966 March on the Pentagon, activities of the Amsterdam and New York Provos⁴; toward that end of the continuum are Kaprow's kind of happenings. In the center of the continuum are highly organized intermedia events—some of Kirby's and Robert

Whitman's work, and "conventional" environmental theater such as the NOG's *Victims of Duty* or Richard Brown's 1967 production of *The Investigation* at Wayne State University. At the far right of the continuum is the orthodox staging of dramatic texts. The analysis of dramatic texts is possible only from the middle of the continuum to the right end; performance analysis is possible along the entire range.

What related transactions comprise the theatrical event? There are three primary ones:

- Among performers.
- Among members of the audience.
- Between performers and audience.

The first begins during rehearsals and continues through all performances. In Stanislavski-oriented training the heaviest emphasis is given to performer-performer transactions. They are, in fact, identified with "the play." The theory is that if the interactions among the performers are perfected—even to the exclusion of the audience from the performers' attention both during rehearsals, which are closed, and during production when the audience is "hidden" on the other side of the proscenium arch—the production will be artistically successful. When this method works the spectators feel they are watching through a fourth wall, "visitors to the Prozorov household," as Stanislavski put it. But there are many examples showing that this method rarely works. It is simply not enough for the performers to be a self-enclosed ensemble.

The second transaction—among members of the audience—is usually overlooked. The decorum of orthodox theater-going is such that the audience obeys strict rules of behavior. They arrive more or less on time, they do not leave their seats except for intermission or at the end of the show, they display approval or disapproval within well-regulated patterns of applause, silence, laughter, tears, and so on. In events on the far left of the performance continuum, it is difficult to distinguish spectators from performers. A street demonstration or sit-in is made up of shifting groups of performers and spectators. And in confrontations between demonstrators and police both groups fill both roles alternately and, frequently, simultaneously. A particularly rich example of this occurred during the March on the Pentagon. The demonstrators had broken through the military lines and were sitting-in in the Pentagon parking lot. Those in the front lines sat against the row of troops and frequent small actions—nudging, exchange of conversation—turned these front lines into focal points. Every half-hour or so, both the front-line troops and front-line demonstrators were

relieved of their posts. Demonstrators who were watching the action became part of it; the same for the troops. Elements of the Pentagon leadership stood on the steps in front of the building's main entrance watching the procedure. For someone at home, the entire confrontation was a performance and everyone—from Defense Secretary Robert McNamara at his window and the ad-hoc demonstration leaders with their bullhorns down to individual soldiers and protesters—was acting according to role.

Very little hard work has been done researching the behavior of audiences and the possible exchange of roles between audience members and performers.⁵ Unlike the performers, the spectators attend theater unrehearsed; they bring to the theater adherence to decorum learned previously but nevertheless scrupulously applied now. Usually the audience is an impromptu group, meeting at the time/place of the performance but never again meeting as a defined group. Thus uncohesive and unprepared, they are difficult to collectivize and mobilize but, once mobilized, even more difficult to control.

The third primary transaction—between performers and spectators—is a traditional one. An action onstage evokes an empathetic reaction in the audience which is not an imitation but a harmonic variation. Thus sadness on stage may evoke tears in the audience or put into play personal associations which, on the surface, seem unrelated to sadness. Conversely, as any performer will eagerly testify, audiences “good” and “bad” affect the performance. Good and bad are sliding terms depending the kind of performance and who is making the value judgment. An active, boisterous audience may be good for farce but bad for serious plays. The “best” audiences are those who respond harmonically up to but not beyond the point where the performers become distracted. Orthodox theater in the West uses a thin fraction of the enormous range of audience-performer interactions. Other cultures are much more adventurous in this regard.

The three primary interactions are supplemented by four secondary ones:

Among production elements.

Between production elements and performers.

Between production elements and spectators.

Between the total production and the space(s) where it takes place.

These are secondary now, but they could become primary.⁶ By production elements I mean scenery, costumes, lighting, sound, make-up, and so on. With the full-scale use of film, TV, taped sound, projected still images and the powerful impact of “style”⁷—production

elements need no longer “support” a performance. These elements are more important than the performers. The Polyvision and Diapolyecran rooms at the Czech Pavilion at Montreal's Expo '67 introduced new kinds of film and still-image environments that can serve either as background for performers or as independent performing elements.⁸

Briefly the Polyvision was a total conversion of a medium-size, rather high ceilinged room into a film and slide environment. Mirrors, moving cubes and prisms, projections both from outside the space and from within the cubes, images which seemed to move through space as well as cover the walls, ceilings, and floors all built the feeling of a full space of great pictorial flexibility. The nine-minute presentation, programmed on a ten-track computer tape used eleven film projectors and twenty-eight slide projectors. The material itself was banal—an account of Czech industry. But of course more “artistic” or “meaningful” material could be used in the system. No live performers participated.

The Diapolyecran was not actually an environment; it was restricted to one wall and the audience sat on the floor watching the fourteen-minute show. Only slide projectors were used. According to the “Brief Description”:

The Diapolyecran is technical equipment which enables a simultaneous projection of slides on a mosaic projection screen consisting of 112 projection surfaces. The surfaces are projected on from behind and they may be shifted singly, in groups, or all at once. This enables one to obtain with still images pictures of motion, and the picture groups thus obtained are best characterized as “mosaic projection.”

Each of the 112 slide projectors was mounted on a steel frame that had three positions: back, middle, forward. The images could be thrust out toward the audience or moved back from it. The mosaic was achieved by complex programming—there were 5.5 million bits of information memorized on tape; 19,600 impulses were emitted per second. By the mid-70s this or similar techniques had become commonplace in museums, business, music TV, and rock concerts. The theater, however, restricted its electronic research to computerizing lighting controls (still using old-fashioned fresnel and ellipsoidal instruments). Little attempt has been made to tap the resources suggested by the Czechs.

But the key to making technical elements part of the creative process is not simply to apply the latest research to theatrical productions. The technicians themselves must become an active part of

the performance. This does not necessarily mean the use of more sophisticated equipment, but rather the more sophisticated use of the human beings who run whatever equipment is available. The technicians' role is not limited to perfecting during rehearsals the use of their machines. During all phases of workshop and rehearsals the technicians should participate. And during performances the technicians should be as free to improvise as the performers, modulating the uses of their equipment night-to-night. Light boards locked into pre-sets do not foster the kind of experimentation I'm talking about. The experience of discos is instructive. The rhythm and content of some light-shows are modulated to accompany and sometimes lead or dominate the activity of the spectator-dancers. During many intermedia performances, the technicians are free to chose where they will project images, how they will organize sound contexts. There is nothing sacred about setting technical elements. If human performance is variable (as it most certainly is), then a unified whole—if one is looking for that—will be better assured by a nightly variation of technical means.

Thus, possibilities exist for "performing technicians" whose language is the film-strip or the electronic sound, and whose range of action includes significant variations in where and what is to be done. The same goes for other technical elements. The separation between performers and technicians is erodable because the new accompany can be used not only to completely program all the material (as at the Czech Pavilion) but also to permit the nearly total flexibility of bits that can be organized on the spot, during the performance. The performing group is expanding to include technicians as well as actors and dancers.

Once this is granted, the creative technician will demand fuller participation in performances and in the workshops and rehearsals that generate performances. At many times during a performance actors and dancers will support the technician, whose activated equipment will be "center stage." A wide-ranging mix is possible where the complexity of images and sounds—with or without the participation of "unarmed" performers—is all but endless.

To achieve this mix of technical and live performers nothing less than the whole space is needed. The kind of work I'm talking about can't happen if one territory belongs to the audience and another to the performers. The bifurcation of space must be ended. The final exchange between performers and audience is the exchange of space, spectators as scene-makers as well as scene-watchers. This will not result in chaos: rules are not done away with, they are simply changed.



The Director talks to Marilyn in David Gaard's *The Marilyn Project* (1975), in the upstairs studio space of The Performing Garage. Note in the background the exact scene duplicated.



The final scene of David Gaard's *The Marilyn Project* (1975), in the upstairs studio space of The Performing Garage. Two men take the famous "calendar girl" pose of Marilyn Monroe as Marilyn photographs them with a polaroid camera.

2: ALL THE SPACE IS USED FOR THE PERFORMANCE

From the Greeks to the present a "special place" within the theater, the stage, has been marked off for the performance. Even in the medieval theater which moved from place to place on wagons the performers generally stayed on the wagons and the spectators in the streets. Most classical Asian theater agrees with the West in this convention. And even village folk-plays are acted out in marked-off areas established for the performance, removed when the show is over.

To find examples of the continuous systematic exchange of space between performers and spectators we must look into ethnographic reports of rituals. There, two circumstances deserve attention. First, the performing group is sometimes the entire population of a village. Or, perhaps, a definite subset of the population such as adult, initiated males. In these cases frequently the uninitiated—women and children—are not permitted to watch; either the uninitiated are kept away or the performances take place in secluded areas. Secondly, these performances are not isolated "shows" but part of ongoing cycles that may extend for months or longer (see chapter 5). Of course, such rituals are entertainments, and prized as such by the people doing them, even as they are something else too. The ritual performances are an integral part of community life, knitted into the ecology of the society—for example, the Hevehe cycle of the Orolo of Papua New Guinea which recapitulates the life experiences of each individual performer.¹⁰

During these kinds of performances, the village, or places near it, is co-opted for the performance. But the performance does not stand still. It ranges over a defined territory. If there are spectators they follow the performance, yielding to it when it approaches, pressing in on it as it recedes. *Dance and Trance in Bali* (1938) filmed by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson shows this spatial give-and-take as well as the full use of a spatial domain that continuously modulates its boundaries. The dancers are highly organized in their movements. But for parts of the performance they and other performers do not feel called on to stay in one spot. Children playing demons race around the village; entranced followers of the lion Barong chase Rangda (the "witch" in Mead's narration) and, as she turns, flee from her. The performance moves in and out of the temple and all across the open areas at the center of the village. The space of the performance is defined organically by the action. Spectators watch from a variety of perspectives, some paying close attention, some ignoring the goings-on (see chapter 7). Unlike orthodox Western theater where the action is trimmed to a fixed space, this Balinese dance-theater creates its own

space as it is being performed. That is not to say that the performers can go anywhere. By the time Mead and Bateson filmed, the Rangda-Barong dance had developed its own mise-en-scene.

Once fixed seating and the automatic bifurcation of space are no longer preset, entirely new relationships are possible. Body contact can occur between performers and spectators; voice levels and acting intensities can be varied widely; a sense of shared experience can be engendered. Most important, each scene can create its own space, either contracting to a central or a remote area or expanding to fill all available space. The action "breathes" and the audience itself becomes a major scenic element. During NOG's *Victims of Duty* we found that the audience pressed in during intense scenes and moved away when the action became broad or violent; usually they willingly gave way to the performers¹¹ and reoccupied areas after the action passed through. During the final scene, Nicolas chased the Detective all around the periphery of the large room that was both stage and house, stumbling over spectators, searching in the audience for his victim. Nicolas' obstacles were real—the living bodies of the spectators—and the scene ended when he caught and killed the Detective. Had someone in the audience chosen to shelter and protect the Detective an unpredictable complication would have been added, but one that could've been dealt with. At several points in the performance, a member of the audience did not want to give up a place where an action was staged. The performers in character dealt with these people, sometimes forcibly moving them out of the area.¹²

These extra tensions may not seem to be a legitimate part of the performance. Surely they are not part of "the play." But the exchange of place implies possibilities of conflicts over space; such conflicts have to be dealt with in terms of the performance. They can be turned to advantage if one believes that the interaction between performers and spectators is a real and valuable one. In many intermedia performances and happenings spectators actively participate. Often the entire space is performing space—no one is "just watching."

The exchange of space between performers and spectators, and the exploration of the total space by both groups, has not been introduced into our theater by ethnographers turned directors. The model influencing theater is closer to home: the streets. Everyday life is marked by movement and the exchange of space. Street demonstrations are a special form of street life involving keen theatrical sense. A march for civil liberties or against the Vietnam War is a performance using the streets as stages and playing to spectators both on the spot and watching at home on TV or reading about it in the newspapers. People march with or without permits. Having a permit means that the

marchers are obeying one set of conventions, to demonstrate without a permit defines the event as guerrilla theater. In either case, the march—or is it the parade?—is defined by rules of the genre; as one set of rules are obeyed another set may be broken. This ever-increasing use of outdoor public space for rehearsed activities—ranging from demonstrations to street entertainers—is having an impact on indoor theater.

3. THE THEATRICAL EVENT CAN TAKE PLACE EITHER IN A TOTALLY TRANSFORMED SPACE OR IN "FOUND SPACE"

Theatrically, environment can be understood in two different ways. First, there is what one can do with and in a space. Secondly, there is the acceptance of a given space. In the first case one *creates* an environment by transforming a space; in the second case, one *negotiates* with an environment, engaging in a scenic dialog with a space.¹³ In the created environment the performance in some sense engineers the arrangement and behavior of the spectators; in a negotiated environment a more fluid situation leads sometimes to the performance being controlled by the spectators.

In the orthodox theater, scenery is segregated; it exists only in that part of the space where the performance is played. The construction of scenery is guided by sight-lines; even when "the theater" is exposed—bare walls of the building, curtains removed—as in some Brechtian scenography—the equipment is looked at as an indication that "this is a theater you are seeing, our workplace"; the place where the spectators are is the viewing place, the house. In short, mainstream attitudes toward scenography is naive and compromised.

In environmental theater, if scenery is used at all, it is used all the way, to the limits of its possibilities. There is no bifurcation of space, no segregation of scenery. If equipment is exposed it is there because it must be there, even if it is in the way.

The sources of this extreme position are not easy specify.¹⁴ The Bauhaus¹⁵ group was not really interested in ordinary scenery. Members of the Bauhaus wanted to build new organic spaces where the action surrounded the spectators or where the action could move freely through the space. Their scenic program was close to Artaud's. Most of the Bauhaus projects were never built. But persons wishing to make theater in the environmental tradition learned from the Bauhaus of new audience-performer relationships.

Although not a member of the Bauhaus, Frederick Kiesler (1896-1966) shared many of their ideas. Between 1916 and 1924 he designed,

but never built, the Endless Theatre, seating 100,000 people. Kiesler foresaw new functions for theater:

The elements of the new dramatic style are still to be worked out. They are not yet classified. Drama, poetry, and scenic formation have no natural milieu. Public, space, and players are artificially assembled. The new aesthetic has not yet attained a unity of expression. Communication lasts two hours; the pauses are the social event. We have no contemporary theater. No agitators' theater, no tribunal, no force which does not merely comment on life, but shapes it (1932).

These words were written in 1932. In 1930, Kiesler described his Endless Theatre:

The whole structure is encased in double shells of steel and opaque welded glass. The stage is an endless spiral. The various levels are connected with elevators and platforms. Seating platforms, stage and elevator platforms are suspended and spanned above each other in space. The structure is an elastic building system of cables and platforms developed from bridge building. The drama can expand and develop freely in space.¹⁶

With some modification, Kiesler could be describing that great environmental theater of middle American consumerism, the shopping mall: vast enclosed spaces where people meet, play, eat, see various organized entertainments, peer through store windows and open doors as if each were a small proscenium, entering whatever particular space entices them. The object of all this desire certainly revolves around buying but is not limited to buying. It also includes numerous rituals of strolling, browsing, mixing, displaying, greeting, and festivity.

From the Bauhaus and people like Kiesler, the environmental theater learned to reject the orthodox use of space and to seek in the events to be performed organic and dynamic definitions of space. Naturally, such ideas are incompatible with mainstream scenic practice.

Kaprow suggests an altogether different source of environmental theater:

With the breakdown of the classical harmonies following the introduction of "irrational" or nonharmonic juxtapositions, the Cubists tacitly opened the path to infinity. Once foreign matter was introduced into the picture in the form of paper, it was only a matter of time before everything else foreign to paint and canvas would be allowed to get into the creative act, including real space. Simplifying the history of the ensuing evolution into a flashback, this is what

happened: the pieces of paper curled up off the canvas, were removed from the surface to exist on their own, became more solid as they grew into other materials and, reaching out further into the room, finally filled it entirely. Suddenly there were jungles, crowded streets, littered alleys, dream spaces of science fiction, rooms of madness, and junk-filled attics of the mind.

Inasmuch as people visiting such Environments are moving, colored shapes too, and were counted "in," mechanically moving parts could be added, and parts of the created surroundings could then be rearranged like furniture at the artist's and visitors' discretion. And, logically, since the visitor could and did speak, sound and speech, mechanical and recorded, were also soon to be in order. Odors followed (1960: 165-66).¹⁷

Many intermedia pieces are environmental. Only recently have happeners "discovered" the proscenium stage; a paradoxical cross-over is starting in which the theater is becoming more environmental while happenings and intermedia (and later Performance Art) are becoming more orthodox scenically.

Kaprow says that his own route to happenings (a usage he coined) was through "action collage"—not the making of pictures but the creation of a pictorial event. In his 1952 essay, "The American Action Painters," Harold Rosenberg described what it means to "get inside the canvas":

[...] the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event (1965: 25).¹⁸

It is only a small step from action painting and collage to intermedia and happenings and from there to environmental theater. My own interest in environmental theater developed from my work in intermedia. My partners in the New Orleans Group—painter Franklin Adams and composer Paul Epstein—followed the same path. Our first definition of environmental theater was "the application of intermedia techniques to the staging of scripted dramas." A painter's and a composer's aesthetics were melded with that of a theater person's. Traditional biases—theatrical, painterly, musical—fell by the wayside. We were not interested in sightlines or in focusing people's attention onto this or that restricted area. The audience entered a room in which all the space was "designed," in which the environment was an organic transformation of one space—the raw rooms in which we put our performances—into another, the finished environments. In *Victims of*

Duty there were "ridges" and "valleys" of carpeted platforms. For those who sat in the valleys vision beyond was difficult. Either they did not see all the action or they stood or they moved. Some of the action took place in the valleys, and then only spectators very close to the action could see it.

For *Victims* a large room, about a 75' x 75' space, at New Orleans' Le Petit Theatre de Vieux Carré was transformed into the Chouberts' living-room. But it was not a living-room in the ordinary sense. Not all the elements had a clear or usual function. It was, rather, the "idea of a living-room" most useful to this production of *Victims of Duty*. In one corner, chairs spiraled to the ceiling; at another place there was a psychoanalyst's couch; on a high isolated platform a wooden chair sat under a bright overhead light; a small proscenium stage was built against one wall for the play-within-the-play; trap-doors allowed the performers to play underneath the audience; a trapeze permitted them to play overhead; certain scenes took place in the street outside the theater or in other rooms adjoining or over the theater—not all of these scenes could be seen by spectators; stairways led to nowhere; technical equipment was plainly visible, mounted on platforms against two walls; the walls themselves were covered with flats and lightly overpainted so that scenes from previous proscenium productions faintly showed through; on these same walls graffiti was painted: quotations from *Victims of Duty*. The scenic idea was to render visible Ionesco's formulation that the play was a "naturalistic drama," a parody of theater, and a surrealist-psychedelic-psychoanalytic-detective story.

We did not foreplan the set. The directors, performers, technicians, and production crews had been working for about a month in the space where the play was to be performed. We had, by the time we moved into the space at Le Petit, been rehearsing for four months. One Saturday afternoon we decided to build the environment. We lugged whatever flats, platforms, stairways, and carpets we could find and worked for ten hours straight. Out of that scenic improvisation came the environment. Very few changes were made during the ensuing weeks of rehearsal. The changes that we did make amounted to tuning up the environment that had been brewing for months but which came into concrete existence during one day. I do not want to make out of this experience a general principle. But I would observe that the close work on the production by more than twenty people led to a felt knowledge of what the environment should be. By not planning at all, by working, we understood very well what was needed.

The very opposite of such a total transformation of space is "found space." The principles here are very simple: (1) the given elements of a



A view of the circular theatre, designed by Jim Clayburgh, erected inside The Performing Garage for Seneca's *Oedipus* (1977). The playing space is filled with tons of earth to the depth of three feet. (Jim Clayburgh)

space—its architecture, textural qualities, acoustics, and so on—are to be explored and used, not disguised; (2) the random ordering of space or spaces is valid; (3) the function of scenery, if it is used at all, is to understand, not disguise or transform, the space; (4) the spectators may suddenly and unexpectedly create new spatial possibilities.

Most found space is found outdoors or in public buildings that can't be transformed.¹⁹ Here, the challenge is to acknowledge the environment at hand and cope with it creatively. The American prototype for this kind of performance is the protest march or demonstration—for civil rights, women's rights, anti-war, labor, special interest groups, etc. The politics of these marches and confrontations have been discussed elsewhere. Their aesthetics deserves more than passing attention. Take the black freedom movement of the 1950s and 1960s, for example. The streets were dangerous for black people, the highways were not free, and local and state governments inhospitable. The sit-ins explored small indoor spaces; the freedom rides had claimed the interior of buses as they passed through the interstate countryside. But the ultimate gesture was the march of thousands in the streets and across miles of highway. The

land was proclaimed open, and if there are those who disagree let them make themselves known. The aesthetic fallout of that grand gesture was that the streets were no longer places used only to get from here to there. They were public arenas, testing grounds, theaters over which morality plays were acted out.

Many demonstrations against the Vietnam War modeled themselves on the civil rights marches. The American-Roman facade of the Pentagon was the proper backdrop for a confrontation between anti-war youth and the troops deployed/displayed by the military-industrial complex. Draft centers and campuses were other natural focal points. What happened at these places is not properly described as political action only. Ceremonies were being performed, morality plays enacted not only for the benefit of the thousands directly involved but for many more people watching on TV. Adapting a phrase from Goffman, these were the places where parts of the public acted out their reality in the expectation that other parts of the public would attend the drama.

One step more conventionally theatrical than the street demonstration or march is guerrilla theater. I helped plan and direct a series of events called *Guerrilla Warfare* which was staged at twenty-three locations throughout New York City on 28 October 1967.²⁰ Two of the twenty-three performances were worth recounting here. One was the 2 p.m. performance at the Main Recruiting Center in Times Square and the other the 6 p.m. performance at the Port Authority Bus Terminal at Eighth Avenue and Forty-Second Street. The Recruiting Center is a place where demonstrations occurred frequently. The police were familiar with the routine. However, our anti-war play attracted a large hostile crowd who closed in on the performers, not threateningly, but aggressively. Some people shouted, many mumbled their disapproval. Because the play was intentionally ambivalent—the "plot" was the public execution of a Vietcong: a super-super patriot might think we were for the war—several teenage kids thought we were American Nazis and from that point of view began to question their own support of the war. The performance went swiftly, some of the dialog was lost in the open air. The performers were not comfortable. We found that the narrow triangular sidewalk, surrounded on all sides by the noise and rush of automotive traffic, and further abbreviated by the pressing crowd, added up to a performance that was brief and staccato.

The opposite happened at the Port Authority. Here, the large, vaulting interior space was suited for sound. We began the performance with performers scattered in space who hummed and then sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." Responding to a sight cue, the performers converged on a central area singing louder as they got

closer together. In the Terminal the swelling anthem seemed to come from everywhere. Because the commuter crowds were not expecting a performance, at first they didn't seem to believe one was taking place. A West Point cadet walked through the performance, paused, and walked away only to return shortly, scratch his head, and stay. Finally, when he realized what was being said, he walked off in disgust. A large crowd gathered; they were curious rather than hostile; their remarks were made quietly, questioning each other about what was going on. Standing as we were in front of the Greyhound ticket booths, just next to the escalators, and alongside a display Ford car, the performance took on a strange surreality without becoming esoteric or arty. The police were not expecting a performance and acted confused; finally they stopped the show seconds away from completion. More than in the other locations, the Terminal performance of *Kill Vietcong* was direct and meaningful. Here, where people passed through on the way to somewhere else, in the bland but massive institutional architecture our culture specializes in, was the place where a symbolic confrontation of values could be clearly demonstrated.

It is possible to combine the principles of transformed and found space. Every space has its own given character. This particularity ought to be lived-in, felt, and respected. An environmental theater design should not be blindly imposed on a site. Also it is possible sometimes to make just a few modifications to a found space so that a performance may more effectively "take place" there. Once a performance "takes shape" in a space, either transformed or found, spectators correspondingly take their places. A definite reciprocity occurs. Frequently, because there is no fixed seating and little indication of how they should receive the performance, spectators arrange themselves in unexpected patterns; and during the performance these patterns change, "breathing" with the action just as the performers do. Audiences can make even the most cunningly transformed space into found space. In environmental theater it is not advisable to block all the stage action with same rigidity as can be done in orthodox theaters. The actions develop more as in a sports match, where certain rules govern how the physical action unfolds as moves by one person or group opens opportunities for responses. Performers need to take advantage of the audience's mobility, considering it a flexible part of the performance environment.

4. FOCUS IS FLEXIBLE AND VARIABLE

Single-focus is the trademark of orthodox theater. Even when actions are simultaneous and spread across a large stage, such as at the

200-foot proscenium of the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, the audience is looking in one direction. A single glance or a simple scan can take in all the action, even the most panoramic. And within these panoramic scenes, there are centers of attention, usually a single focal point around which everything else is organized. Correspondingly, there is a "best place" from which to observe the stage. Traditionally, the king's seat offered the proper vantage; the further one was from this place, the worse the viewing.

Environmental theater does not eliminate these practices, they are useful. But added to it are two other kinds of focus, or lack of focus.

In *multi-focus*, more than one event—several of the same kind, or mixed-media—happens simultaneously, distributed throughout the space. Each independent event competes with the other for the audience's attention. The space is organized so that no spectator can see everything. Spectators move or refocus their attention or select. Some of the qualities not only of multi-compartmented happenings but also of street-markets, side-shows, and amusement parks are employed. I mean more than the three-ring circus. In multi-focus, events happen behind, above, below, around, as well as in front of the spectator. The spectator is surrounded by a variety of sights and sounds. However, it is not necessary that the density of events be "thick." Multi-focus and sensory overload are not equivalent terms though at times they are coincident. Sparse, scattered, low-key and diverse events may be offered simultaneously. Sensory overload leads to a feeling of a small space exploding because it is so full. Sparse events evoke the feeling of space that is large, barely populated, with most of its volume still unexplored. The range of multi-focus extends from one extreme to the other including all intermediate points.

A performance using multi-focus will not reach every spectator in the same way. There is no king's seat. Reactions may be affectively and cognitively incompatible with one another because one spectator puts events together in a different way, or sees different events, than a person sitting close by or at a distance. In multi-focus, the director's role is not to organize a single coherent "statement." Coherence is left to the spectators to assemble. The director carefully organizes the symphony of events so that various reactions are possible. The goal is neither anarchy nor rigidity, but extreme flexibility yielding harmonious combinations—a kind of intellectual-sensory kaleidoscope. The technicians and performers control the sensory input (and one works painstakingly on this), but the reception of various mixes of elements is left to the audience.

In *local-focus*, events are staged so that only a fraction of the audience can see and hear them. During *Victims*, Choubert went into

the audience and spoke quietly to three or four persons. He was saying lines from the play, intimate speeches that asked for a small circle of witnesses and a very low vocal level. At the same time as he was speaking to these few people, another action—on a larger scale—was happening elsewhere. Later, during the bread-stuffing sequence, Nicolas left the central action—which was staged single-focus—and went into the audience where he picked a young woman at random and began kissing and fondling her. He went as far as she would allow—on several evenings Nicolas found a very permissive partner. He spoke into her ear private words of lovemaking. He was also listening for his cue, a line by the Detective who continued the central action of stuffing bread down Coubert's throat. When Nicolas heard his cue, he said to the woman he was kissing, "I'm glad you agree with me." If the woman had not been cooperative, Nicolas would say, "I'm sorry you don't agree with me." In either case, spectators nearby this local scene laughed. Then Nicolas left the woman and rejoined the central action.

Local-focus has the advantage of bringing certain scenes very directly to some members of the audience. A commitment on the part of the performer is possible that cannot be got any other way. But what about the other spectators, those who can't hear or see what's happening? One may offer them their own local actions or a central action. Or—and NOG used this successfully several times in *Victims*—nothing else is going on. Spectators out of the range of sight and sound will be aware that something is happening "over there." A few people will move to that place, but most spectators are too timid, too locked into orthodox theater decorum, to move. Some people will begin to look around the environment, see it and other spectators. For those who are neither participating nor trying to participate, the moments of local-focus are breaks in the action when they can recapitulate what has gone on before or simply think their own thoughts. These open moments allow for "selective inattention." Why should an intermission occur all at once? I have found that these pauses—these pools of inattention—surprisingly draw spectators further into the world of the performance.

Local-focus may of course be used as part of multi-focus. In this case, certain activities are potentially viewable by all, while other activities are not. In fact, all focus possibilities can be used alone or in combination with each other.

It is very hard to get performers to accept local-focus. They are hooked on projecting to everyone in the theater even the most intimate situations and language. They do not understand why the entire audience should not share these intimacies, these private moments. Or they play local-focus scenes as if they were single-focus, with

stereotyped intensity and stage mannerisms. But once a performer accepts the startling premise that privacy (of a kind) is possible and proper in the theater and that the close relation between a performer and a very few spectators or even one, is valid artistically, wide possibilities open. In *Dionysus in 69* while Pentheus was being made love to by his mother (a double mother played by two actresses), members of the Chorus were circulating among the spectators whispering into their ears, "In ten minutes we're going to tear him limb-from-limb, will you help us?" In *Commune* performers moved among the spectators "borrowing" clothes and jewelry that became their costumes for the climactic murder scene. A wide range of subtle actions played out at low volume and intensity can be used. Real body contact and whispered communication is possible between performer and spectator on a one-to-one basis. Local whirlpools of action make the theatrical line more complex and varied than in performances relying on single-focus. The environmental theater space becomes like a city where lights are going on and off, traffic is moving, parts of conversations faintly heard.



Jim Clayburgh's hyperreal environment for *The Envelope*, a small theater next to The Performing Garage for Terry Curtis Fox's *Cops* (1978). (David Behl)

5. ALL PRODUCTION ELEMENTS SPEAK THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

This axiom is implicit in the others. Why should the performer be any more important than other production elements? Because she/he is human? But the other elements were made by people and are operated by them. While discussing the first axiom, I pointed out that technicians should be a creative part of the performance. In environmental theater one element is not submerged for the sake of others. It is even possible that elements will be rehearsed separately, making the performance itself as the arena where cooperating or competing elements meet for the first time.²¹

Either all or portions of the performance can be organized so that production elements function "operatically," all joining to make one unified artwork. When this happens, a pyramid of supporting elements may lift the performers to the apex. But there are other times when the performers may find themselves at the base of the pyramid; and times when there is no pyramid at all but distinct and sometimes contradictory elements. Many multi-focus scenes are structured this way.

The long dialog between the Detective as father and Choubert as son in *Victims* was played in near-darkness with the Detective reading from an almost hidden lectern at the side of a projection booth and Choubert seated among the spectators, his head in his hands. Their dialog supported two films which were projected alternately and sometimes simultaneously on opposite walls. The dialog which held the audience's attention was the one between the films. At other points in the production the performers were treated as mass and volume, color, texture, and movement. Although they were the only performers there, they were not "actors" but parts of the environment.

The principle of autonomous channels each speaking its own concrete performative language underlies many multimedia shows and some rock-music concerts. The same principle has been important in the development of postmodern dance. Its roots go back to Artaud at least, and have been powerfully expressed in the work of John Cage and Merce Cunningham. Cage's music is heard while Cunningham's dancers dance. But the dancers aren't dancing to the music, nor is the music supporting the dance.

Grotowski has carried to the extreme the idea of competing elements, contradictory statements. "There must be theatrical contrast," he says. "This can be between any two elements: music and the actor, the actor and the text, actor and costume, two or more parts of the body (the hands say yes, the legs say no), etc." (Barba 1965: 163).

6. THE TEXT NEED BE NEITHER THE STARTING POINT NOR THE GOAL OF A PRODUCTION. THERE MAY BE NO VERBAL TEXT AT ALL.

One of theater's most enduring clichés is that the play comes first and from it flows all consequent productions. The playwright is the first creator (the author = the authority) and her/his intentions serve as production guidelines. One may stretch these intentions to the limits of "interpretation" but no further.

But things aren't that way. Even in the orthodox theater the play doesn't usually come first.

Plays are produced for all kinds of reasons, rarely because a play exists that "must be done." A producer has or finds money—or needs to take a tax loss; a group of actors want a vehicle; a slot in a season needs to be filled; a theater is available whose size and equipment are suited to certain productions; cultural, national, or social occasions demand performances. One thing is sure—the play is not the thing. Shakespeare's famous sentence ought to be quoted in full: "The play's the thing/ Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." Certainly Hamlet didn't serve the playwright's intentions, but his own pressing motives.

Sanctimonious attitudes toward the text and rehearsals that follow the writer's intentions—where these can be known, which is not very often—yield little in terms of satisfying productions. The repertory as performed in most of our theaters most of the time—from Aeschylus to Brecht and beyond—clogs rather than releases creativity. That repertory will not go away. But need it be preserved, expressed, or interpreted? Cage puts it well:

Our situation as artists is that we have all this work that was done before we came along. We have the opportunity to do work now. I would not present things from the past, but I would approach them as materials available, to something else which we are going to do now. One extremely interesting thing that hasn't been done is a collage made from various plays.

Let me explain to you why I think of past literature as material rather than as art. There are oodles of people who are going to think of the past as a museum and be faithful to it, but that's not my attitude. Now as material it can be put together with other things. They could be things that don't connect with art as we conventionally understand it. Ordinary occurrences in a city, or ordinary occurrences in the country, or technological occurrences—things that are now practical simply because techniques have changed. This is altering the nature of music and I'm sure it's altering your theater, say through the

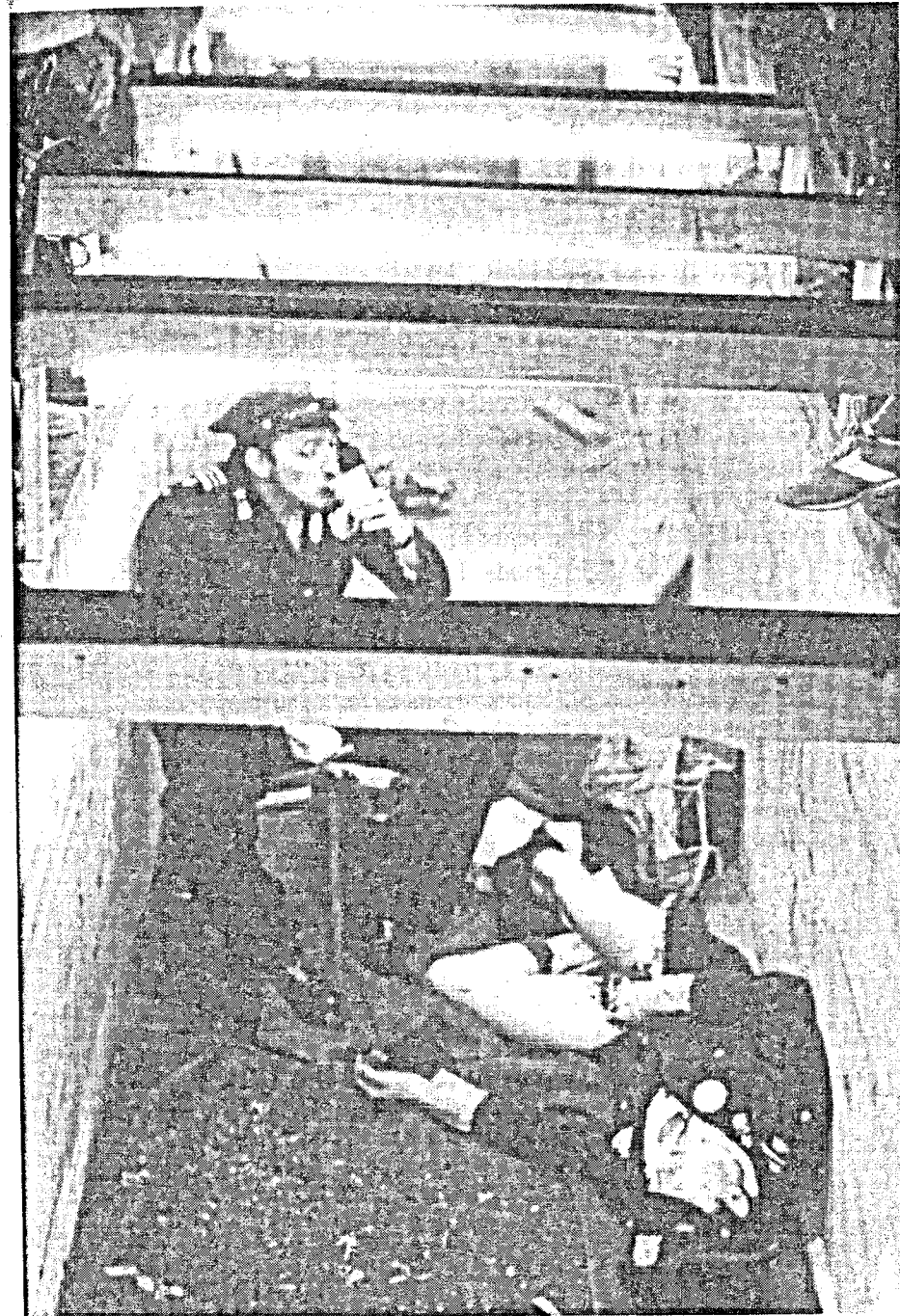
employment of colored television, or multiple movie projectors, photo-electric devices that will set off relays when an actor moves through a certain area. I would have to analyze theater to see what are the things that make it up in order, when we later make a synthesis, to let those things come in (1965: 53-54).

Cage's attitude—treat the repertory as materials not models—is tied to his high regard for advanced technology. But such a link is not necessary. Grotowski shares many of Cage's views regarding classic texts, while taking an altogether different position on technology. A radical new treatment (some will call it mistreatment) of texts does not depend upon one's attitude toward technology. Grotowski's "poor theater" is precisely a theater without technological help, one stripped of everything but the performer-spectator relationship.

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theater can exist without make-up, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, "live" communion. This is an ancient theoretical truth, of course, but when rigorously tested in practice it undermines most of our usual ideas about theater. [...] No matter how theater expands and exploits its mechanical resources, it will remain technologically inferior to film and television (1967: 62).



The opening scene of Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1979), designed by Jerry Rojo for The Performing Garage. (David Behl)



The final scene of Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1979), designed by Jerry Rojo for The Performing Garage. The floor of the theater slid open to reveal a basement mausoleum. The spectators crowd around the edge peering in. (David Behl)

Choosing between Cage and Grotowski is not necessary. Each production contains its own possibilities, some productions want to be "poor" others "rich." What is striking is that men with such diverse attitudes toward technology should stand so close in their understanding of the text's function. Cage says the repertory is material, Grotowski practices montage: rearranging, extrapolating, collating, eliminating, combining texts.

These practices flow from the premises of Axiom 1. If the theatrical event is a set of related transactions, then the text—once rehearsals begin—will participate in these transactions. It is no more reasonable to expect that the text will remain unchanged than that performers will not develop their roles. These changes are what rehearsals are for. In the orthodox theater these changes often are minor adjustments or they may be rewrites by the author. In environmental theater there may be no principle author, or the texts may be a collage of classics, or a mix from many sources and periods. In such a situation "change" does not precisely describe what happens. Grotowski's *confrontation* is a more accurate word.

[The actor] must not illustrate Hamlet, he must meet Hamlet. The actor must give his cue within the context of his own experience. And the same for the director. [...] One structures the montage so that this confrontation can take place. We eliminate those parts of the text which have no importance for us, those parts with which we can neither agree nor disagree. Within the montage one finds certain words that function vis-a-vis our own experiences (1968a: 44).

The text is a map with many possible routes; it is also a map that can be redrawn.²² You push, pull, explore, exploit. You decide where you want to go. Workshops and rehearsals may take you elsewhere. Almost surely you will not go where the playwright intended. Michael Smith, writing in the *Village Voice*, said this of NOG's *Victims*:

I don't in short, think this was a good production of *Victims of Duty*. It might be described as a very good happening on the same themes as Ionesco's play, using Ionesco's words and structure of action; or as an environment in which *Victims of Duty* was the dominant element. The play was there somewhere [...] but it was subservient to, and generally obscured by, the formal enterprise of the production. Several episodes were brilliantly staged, but what came across finally was not the play but the production (1967: 28).

Smith's reaction is correct given his attitude. Later in the same review he said, "I do think the text of the play [...] is 'the first thing, the original impulse, and the final arbiter.'" For environmental theater the

play is not necessarily first, there is no original, and those at hand making the production are the final arbiters. This "making of the production" can be reserved for a single auteur, belong to a collective, or shared with the spectators. The New Orleans Group did not "do" Ionesco's play; we "did with it." We confronted it, searched among its words and themes, built around and through it. And we came out with our own thing.

This is the heart of environmental theater.

Notes

1. Michael Kirby, 1965 and 1972, discusses the distinctions between non-matrixed and matrixed performances. See also Kaprow 1968.
2. For a description of *Self-Service* see Kaprow 1968b.
3. In two books—*Encounters* (1961) and *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), Erving Goffman discussed the expectation-obligation network.
4. A Provo event organized by Abbie Hoffman and James Fourrat was described by John Kifner in *The New York Times* of 25 August 1967. "Dollar bills thrown by a band of hippies fluttered down on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange yesterday, disrupting the normal hectic trading place. Stockbrokers, clerks, and runners turned and stared at the visitors' gallery. [...] Some clerks ran to pick up the bills. [...] James Fourrat, who led the demonstration along with Abbie Hoffman, explained in a hushed voice 'It's the death of money.'" To forestall any repetition, the officers of the Exchange enclosed the visitors' gallery in bullet-proof glass.
5. Since the writing of "Six Axioms" considerable work has been done in the area of "reception theory"—how audiences and readers respond to and construct the works presented to them. For an overview of these studies see Holub 1984. For particular investigations of audiences at performances see Hanna 1983, de Marinis 1987, and Schechner 1985: 117-50.
6. Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, and many performance artists as well as the high-tech of pop music in the MTV era, demonstrate the potentialities of these "secondary interactions." It could be said that the period from the mid-70s through the '80s was one dominated by scenography and technical effects. This is true for theater, pop music, TV, and movies. It is less true for dance where the body as such commands attention.
7. See Hebdige 1979.
8. A complete outline of these techniques can be found in Jaroslav Fric's pamphlet, "Brief Description of the Technical Equipment of the Czechoslovak Pavilion at the Expo '67 World Exhibition." In

- 1967 Fric was chief of research and engineering for the Prague Scenic Institute. Both the Polyvision and the Diapolyecran were developed from ideas of scenic designer Josef Svoboda. For further examples of Svoboda's work see Svoboda 1966: 141-49 and Bablet 1970. I do not know what happened to this line of work, or these people, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.
9. An interesting extension of this idea happened during the NOG *Victims of Duty*. There, for several scenes, performers ran slide projectors and tape decks. During these scenes the actors were both technicians and role-playing performers. They modulated the technical environment in which they were performing.
10. The Hevehe cycle takes from six to twenty years. I discuss it more extensively in "Actuals" (1988: 35-67). See F. E. Williams 1940 for a full account. Williams believes that the cycle has been abbreviated since the intrusion of Western culture in the Papuan Gulf. It seems to me that the cycle is meant to incorporate the life-stages of each initiated Oroko male. During a lifetime each Oroko male plays, literally, many roles each of them embodied in the cycle.
11. On two occasions spectators came to *Victims* intent on disrupting the performance. These attempts were in bad faith: using a mask of spontaneity to conceal planned-in-advance participation. One of these occasions led to a fist fight between a disrupter and another member of the audience who was a friend of mine. The disrupter was thrown out and the show continued with most of the audience unaware that anything unusual had happened. The disrupter's actions and my friend's reactions both seemed to the rest of the audience to be part of the show. The disrupter was a newspaper critic. Such are the small but real pleasures of environmental theater.
12. "Axioms" was written more than a year before I staged *Dionysus in 69*. *Victims* was my first attempt to stage a scripted drama according to the principles of environmental theater. "Axioms" came out of that experience plus my other work with the New Orleans Group and my scholarly research. *Dionysus* was a continuation of work in the same direction. In it the audience participation was more varied and extreme, the use of space more radical. I have always tried to keep a lively dialog going between

my practical and theoretical persons. Much of this dialog relating to environmental theater is discussed in *Environmental Theater*. Beyond that, of *Victims* there is little documentary evidence in existence except a few photos and a short film used in the production. A sizable library exists concerning *Dionysus*, including a full-length film made by Brian de Palma, Robert Fiore, and Bruce Rubin, a book edited by me (Schechner 1970), and William Hunter Shephard's *The Dionysus Group*, 1991.

13. See my "Negotiations with Environment" in *Public Domain* (1969: 145-56).
14. Arnold Aronson (1981) traced one possible line of development of environmental scenography. In Aronson's view "the word *environmental* is applied to staging that is non-frontal. Proscenium, end, thrust, alley, and arena stages are all frontal [...]. Any performance of which this is not true—in which the complete *mise-en-scene* cannot be totally apprehended by a spectator maintaining a single frontal relationship to the performance—must be considered non-frontal or environmental" (1-2). Aronson then goes on to trace "the environmental tradition" from medieval Europe to contemporary Ramlilas performed in northern India, from mumming to the avant-garde, from fairs to amusement parks.
15. For a full account of Bauhaus theater works see Schlemmer, Moholy-Nagy, and Molnar 1961.
16. *Architectural Record*, May 1930. Ideal theaters are a hobby of architects. See, for example, *The Ideal Theatre: Eight Concepts* (1962). When it comes time to build, the visions are scratched and "community" or "cultural" interests take over. The results are lamentable compromises. What most architects and community planners usually ignore are the needs of actors, designers, writers, and directors. Money talks. See A. H. Reiss's "Who Builds Theatres and Why" (1968).
17. For more detailed discussions elaborating on the historical roots of happenings see Kirby 1965 and Kaprow 1966.
18. The quest for sources can become, in composer Morton Feldman's term, "Mayflowering." As such it is an intriguing but not very useful game. However, since I've begun playing the game let me add the Russian Constructivists, the Italian Futurists, Dada, and

Surrealism as all important predecessors to modern environmental theater. Traditional performances all around the world have for millennia used environmental theater.

19. In this regard it's sad to think about the New York Shakespeare Festival or the Avignon Festival. For the first, a stage has been built in Central Park which does its best to make an outdoor space function like an indoor theater. Central Park itself is all but blotted out. When the Festival moves around New York it lugs its incongruent stages and equipment with it rather than negotiating in each locale. At Avignon, the stages built around town are imposed on the architecture and natural environment rather than making productive uses of them. Negotiations have not been attempted between the large environments—natural or people-made—and the stages set in or alongside of. The Greeks—see Epidaurus—knew how, as do those who stage the Ramlila of Ramnagar in India (see Schechner 1985, 151-212). Lee Breuer (*The Tempest*) and Peter Brook (*Mahabharata*) have tried to make creative use of the New York Shakespeare Festival and Avignon spaces.
20. The scenario for *Guerrilla Warfare* was printed in the *Village Voice* on 7 September 1967, prior to the staging of any of the events. The scenario is reprinted in my *Public Domain* (1969: 201-8). Accounts of the events themselves appeared in the *Voice*, 2 November 1967, *The New York Times*, 29 October 1967, and the March 1968 *Evergreen*. The play I used as the root of *Guerrilla Warfare* was Hed's (Robert Head) *Kill Vietcong* (1966).
21. Noh drama uses this principle. A noh performance consists in the meeting of several groups of people each of whom train and rehearse independently. The shite (principle actor), chorus, and koken (non performing performer) work as a unit; the waki (second actor), the kyogen (comic actor), the shoulder drummers, hip drummers, stick drummers, and the flutist each work apart from all the others. If noh is done according to tradition, the shite notifies the others that on X date he plans to do such-and-such a play; they each prepare separately. Several days before the performance the shire assembles the ensemble. He outlines his basic interpretation, maybe there is a low-key run-through of certain key scenes of dances, but there is nothing like a full-scale rehearsal. Only at the performance itself does everything come together. This same approach of unity in immediacy arising out of tension applies to other aspects of noh such as basic play structure,

organization of a day's program of noh dramas, stage architecture, etc. Kunio Komparu calls this "an aesthetic of discord" (1983: 21-29).

22. When I wrote "Axioms" in 1967 I was still several years away from enunciating a clear distinction between dramatic texts and performance texts. Here I am speaking of dramatic texts, and especially of how the NOG treated Ionesco's *Victims of Duty*. The pushing, pulling, exploring, and exploiting referred to is the emergence during rehearsals of a performance text.

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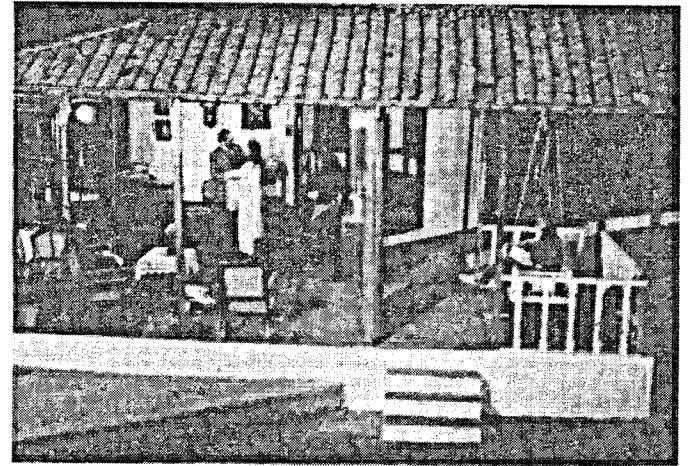
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Ranevskaya's house in act one of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1983) in the outdoor theater on the National School of Drama Repertory, India. The production environment was designed by Nissar Allana. (Nissar Allana)



Strolling through the orchard in act two of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1983). The orchard was planted several hundred feet from the house. The production environment was designed by Nissar Allana. (Nissar Allana)

This earth is my body. The sky is my body.
The seasons are my body. The water is my
body too. The world is just as big as my body.
Do not think I am just in the east, west,
south, or north. I am all over.
Killer-of-Enemies, Apache Hero

Not every place was good to sit or be on.
Within the confines of the porch there was one
spot that was unique, a post where I could
be at my very best. It was my task to
distinguish it from all the other places. The
general pattern was that I had to "feel" all the
possible spots that were accessible until
I could determine without doubt which was
the right one.
Carlos Castaneda

1 Space

In June, 1970, I spent nearly three hours in the anechoic chamber at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After a period of very deep sleep, I awoke with no sense of how big the room was. I could see the walls, the floor, and the ceiling, but that wasn't enough to fix distance, and therefore size. How big was I? How big were the things in the room? When I spoke or shouted, there was no echo. I discovered how much I depended on echo to fix distance and how much I depended on distance to fix size. I crawled across the floor. It was like a big inner-spring mattress with no cloth covering. I measured the space with my body, but I had no assurance that, like Alice in Wonderland, I hadn't changed size. Then I lay still, and I heard gurglings in my stomach, my heartbeat, and an incredibly loud whirring and ringing in my ears. I felt my body try to expand to fill the space of the chamber, and I experienced my skin as a thin bag containing bones and a lot of sloshing fluid.

The fullness of space, the endless ways space can be transformed, articulated, animated—that is the basis of environmental theater design. It is also the source of environmental theater performer training. If the audience is one medium in which the

performance takes place, the living space is another. The living space includes all the space in the theater, not just what is called the stage. I believe there are actual relationships between the body and the spaces the body moves through. Much of workshop and rehearsal is devoted to discovering these relationships, which are subtle and ever-shifting.

The first scenic principle of environmental theater is to create and use whole spaces. Literally spheres of spaces, spaces within spaces, spaces which contain, or envelop, or relate, or touch all the areas where the audience is and/or the performers perform. All the spaces are actively involved in all the aspects of the performance. If some spaces are used just for performing, this is not due to a predetermination of convention or architecture but because the particular production being worked on needs space organized that way. And the theater itself is part of larger environments outside the theater. These larger out-of-the-theater spaces are the life of the city; and also temporal-historical spaces—modalities of time/space. At the start of the Open Theater's *Terminal*:

"We come upon the dying to call upon the dead." We tried many routes to call up the dead: we invented some, and we studied procedures used by people who believe in invocation. What we chose finally was to knock on the door of the dead by tapping with the feet on the floor, the door of the dead. There is no ground where underfoot—below the wood, below the stone—are not the bones of someone who once lived. The guides invited the dead below the stage floor to come through and speak through the dying.¹

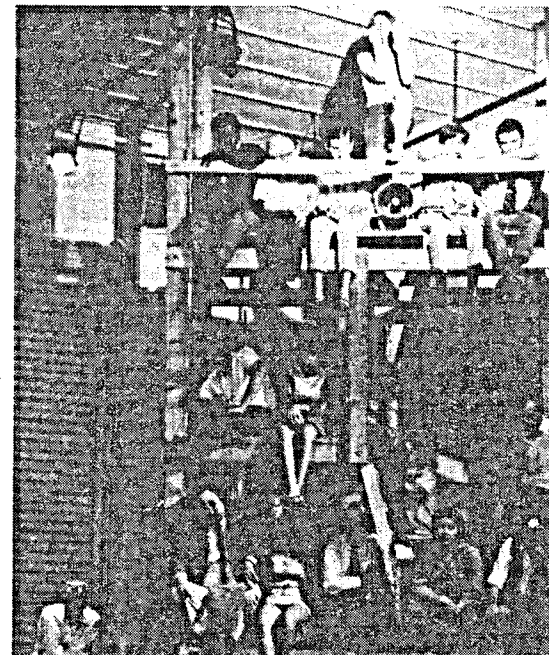
There is no dead space, nor any end to space.

The Performing Garage is roughly fifty feet by thirty-five feet, with a height of twenty feet. Photograph 1 shows the environment for *Dionysus in 69* during the preperformance warmups. One of the two dominant towers is partially visible. The space is organized around a central area marked by black rubber mats. The audience sits on the platforms or on the carpeted floor. The only concentration of audience is a five-tier vertical structure on the north wall, which seats about one hundred persons. The lower levels of this tier can be seen in the upper left corner of the photo. Photograph 2 shows one of the dominant towers of the *Dionysus* environment. Pentheus, with his foot on the rail, is at the top of the

¹ Chaikin (1972), 30.



Photograph 1. Preperformance warmups for *Dionysus in 69*. Performers stretch out on their backs for breathing exercises. Warmups take about one half hour. (Frederick Eberstadt)



Photograph 2. Pentheus addressing the citizens from the top of one of the towers (Raeanne Rubenstein)

4 Environmental Theater

tower addressing the audience and the performers. Spectators sit all around Pentheus. Diagonally across from this tower is its twin, separated by the black mats; about fifteen feet separate the towers.

The action of *Dionysus* occurs in several areas and in several ways. Dominant actions such as the birth of Dionysus, the seduction of Pentheus, and the death of Pentheus take place on the black mats. Choric actions such as the taunting of Pentheus by the chorus, the planning of Pentheus' murder by the chorus, and the soliciting of help from the audience take place in various areas around the periphery, mostly among the spectators. Some actions such as the sexual relations between Dionysus and Pentheus and the initial meeting between Cadmus and Tiresias take place entirely out of sight of the audience, privately. Underneath the visible environment is a pit 35' by 8' by 8'; two trapdoors allow access to the pit. There are good hiding places underneath some of the platforms back close to the walls. These "secret" places were used as well as the public places.

Most of the action is single-focus, but significant actions take place simultaneously. While Pentheus is trying to make love with a person from the audience, the chorus is whispering to other spectators: "Will you help us kill him in ten minutes?" After Pentheus is killed, all the women in the company rush into the audience and simultaneously tell about their part in the murder. At the end of the play, weather permitting, the large overhead garage door—just visible in the upper right hand corner of Photograph 1—is opened, and all the performers march out into Wooster Street, often followed by spectators.²

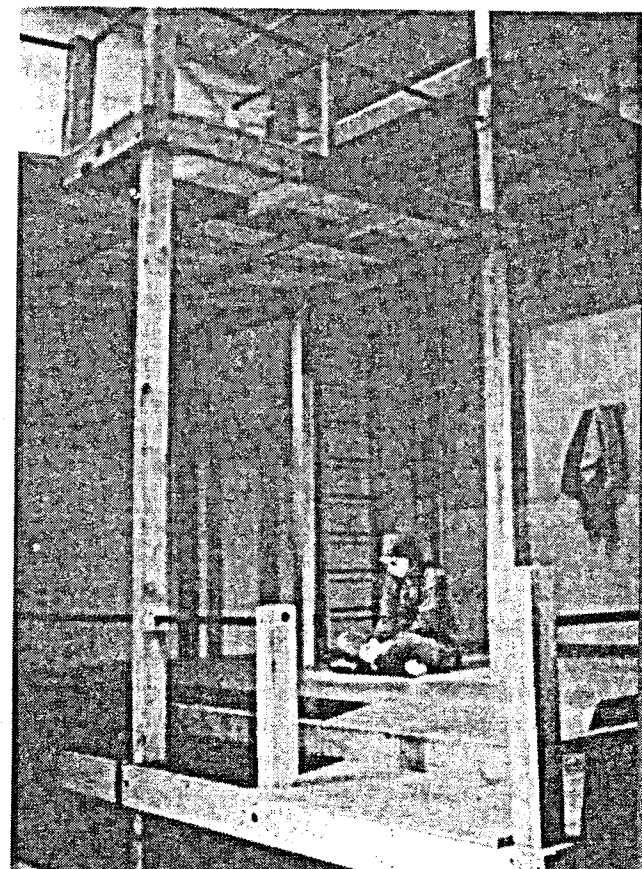
Photograph 3 shows the same space reconstructed for *Makbeth* (1969). Here a series of tightly connected rectangles rise from a central table. On this table much of the major action of the play takes place. But scenes are also acted high in the ramparts, back in corners out of sight of most spectators, and in the pit, which is wholly open, making a trench down the north side of the Garage. The rugs of *Dionysus* are gone, and the bare wood rises from a cement floor. Unlike the open feeling of the *Dionysus* environment, *Makbeth* suggested closed-in spaces, "cabin'd, cribb'd, and confin'd." Photograph 4 shows Lady Makbeth at the opening of the play sitting in her place reciting quietly to herself the text of Makbeth's fateful letter.

In *Dionysus* the audience is free to sit anywhere and invited

² For a complete account of *Dionysus* in 69 see The Performance Group, 1970. A film of the play taken in the Garage is also available.



Photograph 3. *Makbeth* environment, looking across the table to the stairway down which the audience comes entering the theater from the second floor (Frederick Eberstadt)



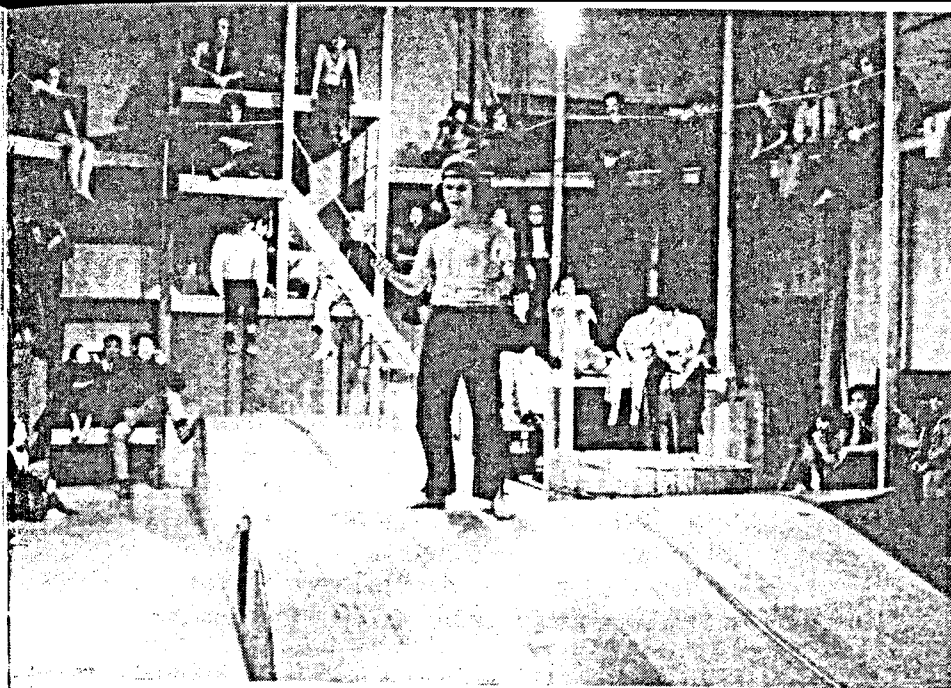
Photograph 4. Lady Makbeth as she appears while the audience is entering. Quietly she is reciting the text of Makbeth's letter to her. (Frederick Eberstadt)

6 Environmental Theater

to move around the environment. One scene is a dance with the audience. Spectators frequently join in the action at various times during a night's performance. In *Makbeth* the audience is restricted to a thirty-inch rim at the edges of the platforms. Action takes place in front and behind the audience, but not with them. On only one occasion during the run were spectators invited to participate. I told the audience of about fifty who were gathered upstairs before the performance that they should feel free to move around the space, following the action, exploring the complexities of the environment. I warned them that most of the actions were clustered in bunches performed simultaneously, so that following one action meant missing others. I asked them to remove their shoes so that their movements would not unduly disturb the performers. Nevertheless most of the performers felt that the movement of the audience was a distraction, and the experiment was not repeated. Audience movement is used extensively in *The Tooth of Crime*.

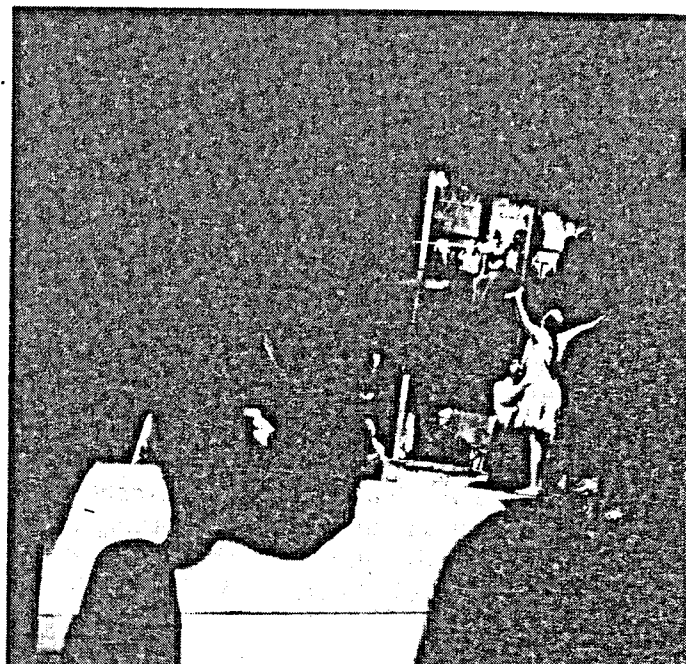
Photograph 5 is of *Commune*. Here "pueblos" are built in two corners of the Garage; these are connected by a four-foot-wide "road" elevated to eleven feet. The center area is dominated by a gentle Wave that rises, falls, rises, and falls again. Next to the Wave is a tub three feet deep and six feet in diameter. The Wave and tub are used during the performance as many things: boat, sea, land, house, blood, village, beach, yard. The audience sat mostly high in the environment, though on crowded nights a number of persons sat on the floor. There was some audience movement through the space. For one scene all the audience was asked to sit on the Wave, and most did so. The action shown in Photo 5 is of Clementine leaping off a promontory into the arms of the other performers who then "fly" her around the space.

Photograph 6 is a view of the *Commune* environment from a height of about five feet and looking out through the legs of a spectator sitting above. Most of the views are not obstructed. But more than in *Commune* or *Dionysus* spectators have the choice of sitting at the edge of a platform, deep in a pueblo, with other persons, or alone. The spectator can choose his own mode of involving himself within the performance, or remaining detached from it. The audience was offered real choices and the chance to exercise these choices several times throughout the performance. The spectator can change his perspective (high, low, near, far); his relationship to the performance (on top of it, in it, a middle distance from it, far away from it); his relationship to other spectators (alone, with a few others, with a bunch



Photograph 5. *Commune*, looking toward the west pueblos. In the foreground is the Wave, and at the rear right is the tub. (Frederick Eberstadt)

Photograph 6. *Commune*, from back in a pueblo. (Elizabeth LeCompte)



8 Environmental Theater

of others); whether to be in an open space or in an enclosed space. Surprisingly few spectators took advantage of the opportunities to change places. Even when the performers encouraged moves—such as saying to the audience when everyone was assembled on the Wave, “When you return to your places, perhaps you want to go to a new place to get a different view of the events”—only a small proportion of the spectators went back to places different from where they’d come.

Photograph 7 shows a group of spectators assembled in the center of the Wave during the play’s final scene. The spectators had previously been invited into the center of the Wave to represent the villagers of My Lai. (This scene has undergone many changes over the years *Commune* has been in TPG repertory; the play is still being performed and still being changed.) The scene photographed is of an interview between Spalding and several reporters. The character is being asked about his reactions to the murder of his pregnant wife.

Photograph 8 is of the *The Tooth of Crime*. The view is from a gallery above the playing areas which are in and around a large houselike structure built entirely from plywood modules. For the first time TPG used a structure that blocks vision and has no single arenalike central playing space. Spectators move around the viewing gallery or on the floor in order to follow the action of the play. Also there are windows cut in the environment so that scenes can be seen framed in the environment—giving a filmlike shifting focus to the action. The patterns of movement in *Tooth* are irregular circles on the floor, with a lot of climbing into the modules. Each of the characters has a station in the environment; the characters move but often return to their stations. Some of the feel of *Tooth’s* action is of a medieval play.

The *Tooth* environment is modular. Each of the plywood sides is perforated so that it can be joined to other sides in a variety of ways. Squares, rectangles, polygons, and near-circles can be built. Low, medium, and high platforms or towers rising to sixteen feet as in *Tooth* are possible. The modules can be reconstructed in numberless variations. The entire system is non-mechanical: It can be entirely reconstructed by hand. Jerry N. Rojo designed this modular system because TPG needed flexibility in order to stage a number of works in repertory. I will not be discussing *The Tooth of Crime* except in Chapter 7, because we are still in an early stage of working on it.

Rojo, in collaboration with the Group, designed all the environments for TPG discussed in this book. He is, in my opinion, the



Photograph 7. Spectators and performers together in the final scene of *Commune* (Frederick Eberstadt)



Photograph 8. *The Tooth of Crime* environment, looking from the gallery to the center structure. Performers on four levels. The audience follows the action on foot around the theater from scene to scene. (Frederick Eberstadt)

world's leading environmentalist. A large portion of his genius is in solving all the formidable artistic-technical problems we put to him in requiring a flexible, transformational space without the encumbrance of heavy or expensive machinery.

I met Rojo at Tulane University where he came in September, 1966, on a leave of absence from the University of Connecticut. He had his master's from Tulane and came back to work for his doctorate. The New Orleans Group was working on *Victims of Duty*. I was teaching a seminar in performance theory. Paul Epstein, Arthur Wagner, and Rojo were among those who attended the seminar. We had before us some of the work of Jerzy Grotowski, Happenings, examples of ritual theater, and game theory—of both the mathematical kind and Eric Berne's. Wagner was teaching acting, Epstein was a musician, Rojo a designer. I recall nothing specific about the seminar, but I know it acted on my ideas strongly. I remember that Rojo said little. Over the year we got to be friends. He was the one "technical person" at Tulane who was interested in my ideas. Then when we were finishing rehearsals for *Victims*, we ran into some technical problems. We wanted a pile of chairs spiraling from the floor to the ceiling strong enough for Choubert to climb on. I asked Rojo to come down to the studio theater of Le Petit Théâtre de Vieux Carré where *Victims* was being staged.

He liked the environment very much. He solved the problem of the chairs by building an armature of very strong plastic-coated wires from which the chairs blossomed like tree leaves. The next year in New York TPG was in the middle stages of *Dionysus* rehearsals. Mike Kirby had drawn some towers that I thought would be a good central image for the environment. But Mike wanted towers of a certain shape placed in a certain way; and I wanted something else. I phoned Rojo at Connecticut, and he said he'd help. He made new designs for the towers. I liked them immensely. He went ahead and built the towers.

So that is Rojo with hammer and saw. I think my deepest respect for him comes because he knows that environmental design = construction. The ideas are okay, the renderings beautiful, the models exciting—but it all comes down to hammers, nails, materials, and making the space into the shapes you need.

I think it's the same with performing. The daily physical commitment is what counts. The spirit is the body at work.

After *Dionysus* I invited Rojo to design *Makbeth*. I also asked Brooks McNamara who, like Rojo, had been a student at Tulane.

During the winter of 1968–1969 they both worked on designs that ranged from Ziggurats to mazes to cattle runs. Finally, both Rojo's and McNamara's ideas were used. Then I asked Rojo to design *Commune*. Then he designed *The Tooth of Crime*.

These eight photographs give some indication of the flexibility possible in a small space such as the Garage. Each environment has a different feel, though all are made from simple wood structures. The audience is arranged in different ways and the action flows through the spaces differently for each production. In *Dionysus* there are many circular movements centered around the black mats; the flow is basically uninterrupted and with few turbulent eddies. In *Makbeth* the moves are angular, there are many private actions, much simultaneity, sharp, disjointed gestures, and harsh sounds coming from several directions at once. Heights were used much more than in *Dionysus*. *Commune* returns to some of the circularity of *Dionysus*, but the circles are incomplete, broken off. Most of the action takes place in the center area, on or near the Wave. *Tooth* flows in tight eddies, circles, and figure eights, and the characters often spy on each other from heights or hidden vantage points.

Each environment grew from detailed work with the performers. Work with Rojo begins after the work with the performers is well under way. I try to make the environment a function of the actions discovered by the performers. Of course a reciprocity develops between space and idea, movement and characterization. In the case of *Makbeth* the fact that so much of the rehearsing was done in Yugoslavia far from the Garage led to a production style that hampered the performance.

Environmental design comes from daily work on the play. The environment develops from workshops, discussions, drawings, and models. Models are important because no two-dimensional rendering can give an accurate feel of space. Rehearsals are held in partially finished environments because the performers' work will revise the plans even during the construction phase. After opening, the environment changes as new aspects of the work are uncovered. The Performance Group's work with both the *Dionysus* and *Commune* environments was superior to work with the *Makbeth* environment because many rehearsals, open and closed, were held in the partially completed environments. The space and the performance developed together. On the other hand, the Group returned from Yugoslavia to a totally finished, extraordinarily strong *Makbeth* environment—a marriage between

the environment and the performance was never consummated.

Work on an environment may begin long before a play has been selected or a script assembled. The basic work of TPG is with space: finding it, relating to it, negotiating with it, articulating it.³ Whenever the Group arrives somewhere to perform, the first exercises put people in touch with the space.

Move through the space, explore it in different ways. Feel it, look at it, speak to it, rub it, listen to it, make sounds with it, play music with it, embrace it, smell it, lick it, etc.

Let the space do things to you: embrace you, hold you, move you, push you around, lift you up, crush you, etc.

Let sounds come out of you in relation to the space—to its volumes, rhythms, textures, materials.

Walk through the space, run, roll, somersault, swim, fly.⁴

Call to another person with words, with names, with unworded sounds, with unsounded breathing. Listen to the calls, try them from different places.

Then find a place where you feel most safe. Examine this place carefully, make it your home. Call from this place, this home, this nest. Then find a place where you feel most threatened. Call from there. Move from the bad place to the good place while singing softly.

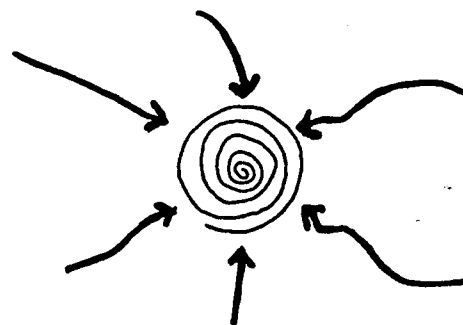
I believe there is an actual, living relationship between the spaces of the body and the spaces the body moves through; that human living tissue does not abruptly stop at the skin. Exercises with space are built on the assumption that human beings and space are both alive. The exercises offer means by which people communicate with space and with each other through space; ways of locating centers of energy and boundaries, areas of interpenetration, exchange, and isolation, "auras" and "lines of energy."⁵

³ Articulating a space means letting the space have *its* say. Looking at a space and exploring it not as a means of doing what you want to do in it, but of uncovering what the space is, how it is constructed, what its various rhythms are. Maybe staying still in it, as in the spaces of some cathedrals.

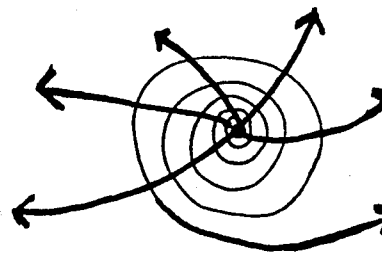
⁴ When an action is literally impossible—such as swimming or flying—the performer does it sonically, or in action with the help of others. If a person cannot fly by himself, he can be carried in such a way that he gets a sense of flying. If he cannot swim through air, he can make his breath find the rhythms of swimming.

⁵ Much work needs to be done in pinpointing the exact relationships between the human body and space. Many apparently mystical concepts will,

An exercise based on these assumptions was developed by the Group at the start of a summer residency at the University of Rhode Island in 1971.



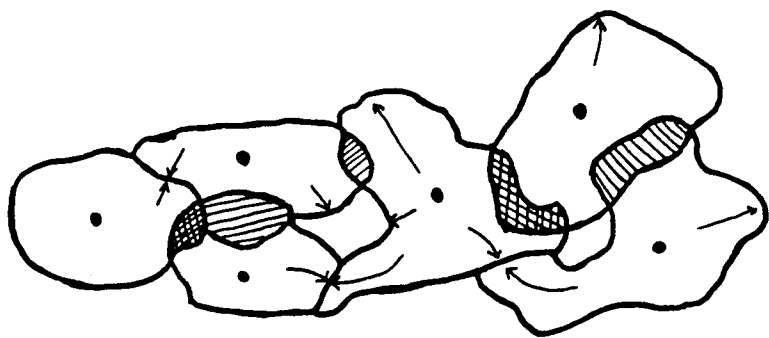
1. Performers move slowly toward each other until they are compressed into a living ball. They pack themselves together more and more tightly until there is no room. They collapse toward no space, toward infinite inward pressure.



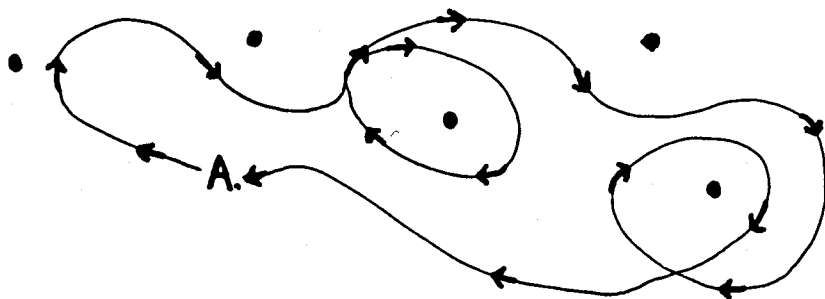
2. Then, an explosion of the primal mass into the space; an explosion with sound. Ideally the primal mass is at the center of the

I think, be found to have roots in fact. Just as the blind bat sees with high-frequency sound, so the human being has many ways of locating himself in space; means other than seeing and sounding. I believe that energy is broadcast and received very precisely and that we are at the threshold of understanding what and how. Also we are on the verge of conceding that there is no such thing as dead space or empty space.

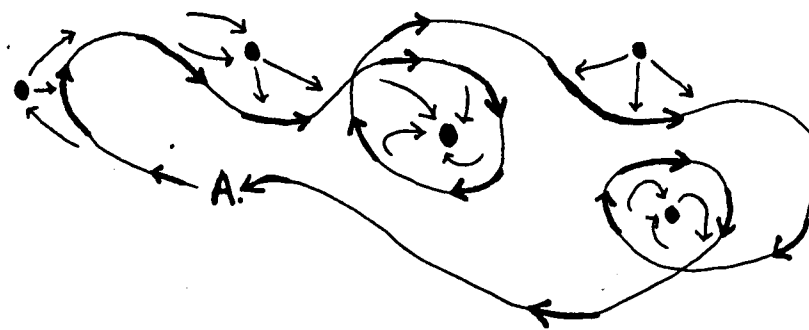
space, equidistant from walls, ceiling, and floor—so that the explosion goes in all directions.



3. Each person comes to rest in a place where he feels safe, centered, defined in relation to space and the others. From this center each person marks out his boundaries, finds the points where he confronts others, where there are contested spaces, where he harmoniously shares space. The space is structured by fields of personal energies.



4. Each performer determines for himself a route through the space. He keeps this map to himself, and once it is set, it cannot be changed. The reason for this rigidity is so that the experience of one performer does not cause another performer to later alter his route, his own experience. Of course the exercise can be done with people choosing maps on the moment. The map of performer A is shown above.



5. Performer A passes through many different energy fields. Sometimes he is drawn in, sometimes pushed away, sometimes torn between two or more currents. As A makes his way, the others react with sounds, movements (without displacing the feet), and breathing rhythms. A moves either fast or slow, depending on the energies he feels; he makes sounds or remains silent.

This exercise with its allusions to the "big bang" theory of universal creation and to the voyage home of Ulysses through seas of temptations, dangers, and pleasures gives performers a sense of *how full space is*. The problem is identifying the constantly changing patterns of energy that radiate through spaces—energy that comes from people, from things, from the shapes of the space.

Exercises like the two described help performers make space-maps—read space in many different ways. Western thought accustoms us to treat space visually. But acoustic, thermal, tactile, olfactory, and brain-wave maps can also be drawn. An olfactory map, for example, will not have the sharp edges of a visual map—it will be fluid, always changing, literally drifting on the wind, with eddies and intense centers shading off toward ill-defined edges.

In the spring of 1969 TPG explored the relationship between the snout—the nose and mouth, the cavities of the sinuses and throat—the gut, and the larger spaces in the theater to the large gut spaces in the body. The work culminated with an exercise in June:

Everyone in a circle. In the center a basket covered with a white cloth. After two minutes of silence the cloth is taken

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FOR THE CHINA FRONTIER SERVICE IN MEXICO

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the President of the Senate, dated January 1, 1901. The letter is signed by William McKinley and is addressed to John D. Long. The letter is a copy of a letter that was sent to the President of the Senate by the President of the United States. The letter is a copy of a letter that was sent to the President of the Senate by the President of the United States.

After the 1954 bank crash, a group of individuals met to discuss the situation and the need for a new organization. The group decided to form the National Council on the American Indian, which was established in 1955. The council's purpose was to provide a forum for the discussion of Indian problems and to coordinate efforts to improve the Indian situation. The council has since held numerous conferences and has published several reports on Indian affairs.

[illegible]

Comic	1969	71
Editor	1962	102
Writer	1961	96

away. The basket is full of peaches, strawberries, bananas, cherries, grapes, and blueberries.

Everyone concentrate on the fruit. Imagine biting into it, tasting it, smelling it. Then, one at a time, performers go to the basket and using only the snout take one grape or berry. Roll it around your mouth, under your tongue; play with it as long as you can. Then bite into it, feel its juices and flavor, chew it as slowly as you can. Swallow.

One performer goes back to the basket, takes a berry or grape with his snout. This piece of fruit is passed around the circle from mouth to mouth.

Everyone goes to the basket and with your snouts, making as many trips as necessary, bring back a pile of fruit for yourself. Then put as many berries and grapes in your mouth as you can keep count of. When you lose count of how many you have, bite. Let the juices run down your chin. Sit quietly.

Look at the basket. Everyone at once, animal-like, making sounds, using only snouts, rush to the basket and take the fruit. Carry it to a safe place and eat.

Find each other. Clean each other with your tongues, cat-style. Relax, make sounds, take each other in. Take in the whole scene: empty basket, white cloth, stained clothing, scatterings of fruit-leavings.

This exercise took about three hours. The lighting in the Garage was a spotlight on the basket of fruit and scattered low-intensity lights elsewhere. The *Dionysus* environment was standing, and the soft rugs helped the exercise. I recall the fierceness with which people took the fruit and devoured it. Then they rushed from the center of the theater to dens, perches, nests, lairs. Only after a long while did they return to the open.

Through a process I don't understand but accept, the *insides of the body perceive space directly*. This visceral space-sense is activated by exercises like the fruit-eating. Exercises in smelling also activate the visceral space-sense. Visceral perception is related to the actual wash of the guts inside the body. To get at this you have to let go of sight, hearing, and touching with the skin. Things must be tasted and smelled, touched with the nostrils, mouth, lips, tongue, anus, and genitals: those places where the viscera is on or close to the surface. Visceral space-sense is not about edges, boundaries, outlines; it is about volumes, mass, and rhythm. The exercise in which a performer moves through spaces energized by others is about boundaries. "Fruit-eating" is about rhythm.

I can't draw all this material into a neat bundle because I don't have a theory that can handle it. But let me throw a few more things at you. Richard Gould says that Australian aborigines perceive landmarks as "nothing less than the bodies of the totemic beings, or items connected with them, transformed . . . into individual waterholes, trees, sandhills, ridges, and other physiographic features, as well as into rock alignments and sacred rock-piles."⁶ This is very much like what S. Giedion finds in the prehistoric art of the caves:

One could give an almost endless list of instances showing how forms of animals, imbued with mystic significance, were born out of the rock: the bison in La Mouth (Dordogne), where the whole outline of the back, and to a certain extent even of the head, had been formed by the natural rock; the bison of the cavern of El Castillo (Santander), where major parts of the body had been seen in a stalactite and only a few lines were necessary to bring out the image; the group of polychrome bison on the ceiling of the cavern of Altaïra, whose unusual recumbent positions stem from the form of the rock protuberances. . . . Rock, animal, and outline form an inseparable unit.⁷

Or the things Antonin Artaud saw in Mexico:

Nature has wished to express itself over a race's entire geographic compass. . . . I was able to grasp that I was not dealing with sculpted forms but with a specific play of light, which *combined* itself with the outline of the rocks. . . . And I saw that all the rocks had the shape of women's busts on which two breasts were perfectly outlined.⁸

Artaud also saw heads, torsos in agony, crucifixions, men on horses, huge phalluses, and other images impressed on the rocks or rising from them. "I saw all these forms became reality, little by little, in accordance with their rule."

In all these cases not only is the separation between man and his environment transcended, but each is the image of the other. A recurrent claim of shamans is that they can take their guts out, wash them, and replace them; or that they have had their corruptible human guts replaced by eternally durable ones of stone.

⁶ Gould (1969), 128.

⁷ Giedion (1962, Vol. 1), 22.

⁸ Artaud (1965), 94-96.

The visceral space-sense is elusive, even for those who have experienced it. It is a communication from within the spaces of the body to within the spaces of the place one is in. You become aware of your body as a system of volumes, areas, and rhythms; as a coordinated collection of chambers, channels, solids, fluids, and gases; as a combination of resilient, hard, inner skeleton covered and held together by supple, tensile muscles and membranes—all this supporting and surrounding central, pulsating, life-source bays, gulfs, and bundles of mobile guts.

Donald M. Kaplan has carried these ideas to the point where he believes all theater architecture is an expression of infant body-states. He thinks that the proscenium is a perfected form wherein the digestive guts seated in the darkened auditorium hungrily await the "food" chewed and fed from the brilliantly illuminated stage (mouth). "The interface of stage and auditorium is not a celebration of a maturational achievement, as certain other architectural forms are. A theater reminds us of a dynamic condition."⁹ This condition is the digestive tract from mouth to stomach.

Thus, as the theatre fills up and the performers prepare to go on, a voracity in the auditorium is about to be shaped and regulated from the stage by an active exercise of some kind of prescribed skill. At this point, we can begin to answer the question of what a theatre does kinesthetically, by observing that its geometrics and functions favor a juxtaposition of a *visceral* and *executive* experience.¹⁰

The visceral audience awaits satisfaction from the actors who feed the performance to them.

By putting everyone on stage, so to speak, the environmental theater does away with the dichotomy Kaplan identifies. The audience in environmental theater must look to itself, as well as to the performers, for satisfaction of visceral needs. This less sharply delineated division of roles, actions, and spaces leads *not* to deeper involvement, not to a feeling of being swept away by the action—the bottomless empathy enhanced by darkness, distance, solitude-in-a-crowd, and regressive, cushioned comfort of a proscenium theater—but to a kind of in-and-out experience; a sometimes dizzyingly rapid alternation of empathy and distance.

The orthodox theater-goer is snuggled. He can keep his reac-

tions to himself, and he is more likely to get utterly wrapped up in the experience on stage. This is even truer in the movies, where there is absolutely no responsibility to respond, because the actors in a film are not present at the theater. In the environmental theater the lighting and arrangement of space make it impossible to look at an action without seeing other spectators who visually, at least, are part of the performance. Nor is it possible to avoid a knowledge that for the others you are part of the performance. And insofar as performing means taking on the executive function, every spectator is forced into that to some degree by the architecture of environmental theater.

Spectators experience great extremes—of deep, perhaps active involvement and participation; then critical distancing, looking at the performance, the theater, the other spectators as if from very far away. Sometimes a spectator will freak out, go so far into the experience that he is lost inside it. More than a few times I have talked someone back from very far places. But the other extreme also occurs. I have spent many hours watching performances from a detached, disinterested point of view; and I have seen others do likewise. This is not a question of boredom, but of focusing on aspects of the performance other than the narrative, or the feelings of the performers. These aspects—technical, environmental, spectator behavior—are masked in the orthodox theater. You couldn't focus on them if you wanted to. In environmental theater there are endless degrees of attention, subtle gradations of involvement. The experience of being a spectator, if you let yourself get into it, is not smooth but roller-coaster.

Many people, trained in the rigid reaction program of orthodox theater, are embarrassed by what they feel at environmental theater. They think that the in-and-out reaction is "wrong" or an indication that the play "doesn't work." People come up to me and say, "I couldn't keep my attention focused on the play." Or, "I was moved by some of it, but I kept thinking my own thoughts. Sometimes I lost track of what was going on." Or, "Sometimes I felt good, but at other times I felt threatened." Or, "You know, I watched the audience so much I lost part of the play." Or even, "I fell asleep." I think all of these responses are splendid.

If the body is one source of environmental theater design, there are also historical and cultural sources. The body gives data for space-senses while historical or cultural studies give data for

⁹ Kaplan (1968), 113.

¹⁰ Kaplan (1968), 117–108.

space-fields. Modern European-American culture is prejudiced in favor of rectangular, hard-edged spaces with clear boundaries and definite senses of right and left, up and down. There is only a blurry idea of what happens inside these boundaries. We fight wars to preserve boundaries, while letting the life inside our nations deteriorate.

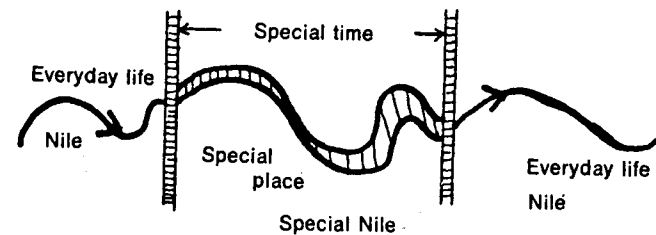
Space may be organized without a single axis, as among the Eskimo where figures in the same field are "upside down" relative to each other. Give an Eskimo child a paper to draw on, and he will fill up one side and continue to draw on the other side with no more thought of discontinuity than you have when you follow a sentence in this book from one page to the next. Space may be organized with a distorted or permuted axis as in surrealist art or topographic mathematics. Or it may be organized according to the X-ray technique of the Northwest Coast Indians who see the inside and outside of an object with equal clarity—a cow with her unborn calf in her belly, a fish with a hook lodged in its throat, a man with his heart beating in his chest.

Space can be organized according to time, so that sequence in space = progression in time, as in Egyptian panels, medieval tryptichs, and the settings for morality plays in which the progress of history from the Creation to the Fall to the Crucifixion to Salvation or Hell was plain to all who had eyes to see. Space can be organized so that size, not distance, indicates importance. In Egyptian art the gods are biggest, the pharaohs next, and so on through many classes until we reach tiny slaves. Examples are without limit. Space can be shaped to suit any need.

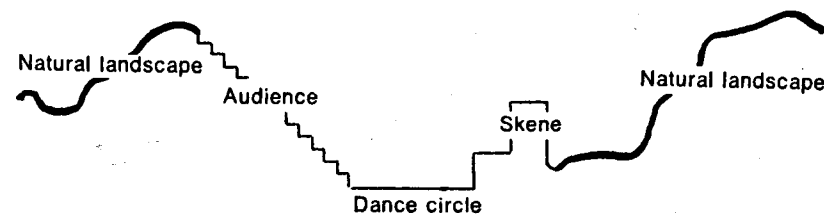
The concept of *space-field* may be easier to grasp if I briefly present five kinds of performance space-fields: Egyptian, Greek, Balinese, Mexican, and New Guinean. The first two are historical, and the last three exist today.

The Egyptians staged periodic ceremonial spectacles. For these they built entire cities and floated great, ornate barges down the Nile. The river was not only the liquid, flowing stage for much of the Heb-Sed; it was itself the source of all Egyptian life, a living participant in the great drama of renewal. Time itself was stopped for the Heb-Sed festival. (We retain this idea of a holiday being time out.) The days of the Heb-Sed were not part of the calendar. The function of the mighty festival was to renew all of Egypt starting with the pharaoh. He himself played the major role in the drama. "It was not a mere commemoration of the

king's accession. It was a true renewal of kingly potency."¹¹ The theater event was performed in a special place that existed in a special time. But through this specialness flowed the eternal Nile which was both sacred and profane. And like the Nile, everyday Egyptian life was transformed by the Heb-Sed and renewed.



Via Crete and other Mediterranean stepping-stones the Greeks took much from the Egyptians including the idea that the theater is a festival: something that exists at a special time in a special place. But the Greeks were also influenced by prehistoric shamanistic ceremonies coming down from central Asia and Europe. Animism, nature worship, and landscape were very important to the Greeks who, in this regard, were not so far from today's aborigines. The Greek theater raised its audience in a semicircle around a full-circle dancing area. The audience area was made from a natural hill, and every Greek theater gives a beautiful view over the skene to the landscape beyond. Thus the Greek arrangement included elements of holiday (= time out) and continuity with the landscape and the gods who dwelt therein.

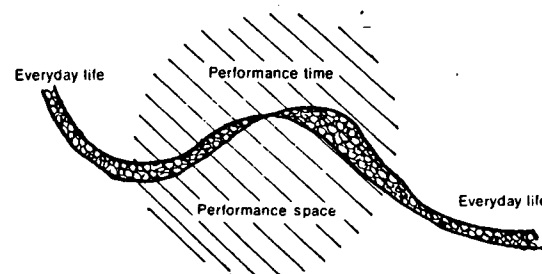


Furthermore, the Greeks liked watching the dances not as discreet moves but as completed sequences, finished figures—a kind of stepped-out destiny in movement. In some surviving Greek theaters there are pavements of different-colored stones tracing the dance routes: architectural scripts. These pavements help the memories of dancers and spectators alike. At any given moment

¹¹ Frankfort (1948), 79.

the whole dance is known, and the dancers are seen as figures somewhere on the course. We tried for something like this in the *Commune* environment where different maps, figures, routes, and writing were marked on the floor and other parts of the environment. We used masking tape because that suggests the police reconstructing a crime and a stage manager marking the floor of a theater.

Nothing could be further from the Egyptian and Greek uses of space than the Balinese. The Balinese build nothing special for theater. They do no seasonal plays. They perform in the village square, on temple steps, in courtyards, or on temporary stages thrown up for the occasion. And the occasion may be a marriage, a birth, a stroke of good fortune, a Hindu holiday, a need to placate the gods, or the means by which a rich man shows how rich he is. The performers are magnificently costumed and trained; they are professional in every sense except the commercial. But there is little formality surrounding a performance. Dogs eat some of the ceremonial food signaling the gods' acceptance of the offering, children play in the street in the midst of the trance-dancers, old men doze on their porches, women market, and those who want to watch the play do.



Theater in Bali accompanies everyday life. There is no time out for theater. To the Balinese theater happens anytime, anywhere, and its gestures are continuous with the rest of living.

This integration of ceremonial and everyday is present in many Oriental cultures. M. C. Richards describes the Japanese Raku Ware where a person makes a teacup, fires it, and drinks out of it "all in a single rhythm."¹² The high formality of Japanese theater is a refinement of daily, courtly, and military gestures. There is no break between theater and the rest of life—only increasingly delicate stages of refinement. The Japanese theater seems alien even to Japanese, because its gestures have been

¹² Richards (1970), 29.

frozen in time. But at the beginning these gestures were not strange.

Sometimes a ritual drama can absorb the whole attention and energies of a town without calling for any special construction. The existing village remains intact, but it is transformed by the drama into another time and place. Recently such a drama has been uncovered in coastal mountains of western Mexico. The Cora of Mesa del Nayar were converted to Catholicism by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century. Then in 1767 the Jesuits were expelled from Mexico. No priest appeared on the Mesa until 1969. During the two hundred years without contact these Cora maintained many Roman Catholic rites, among them a Holy Week passion play.

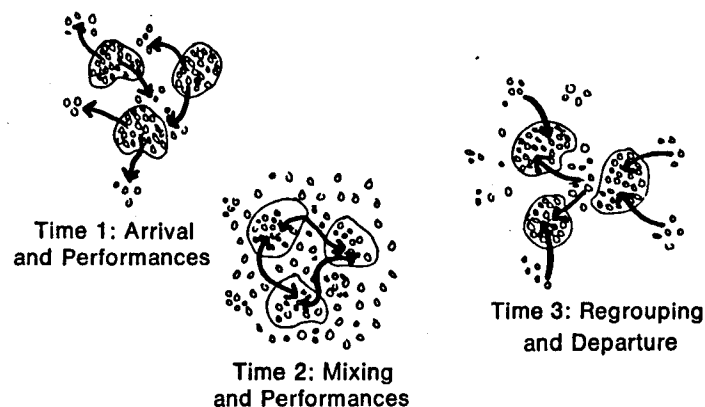
But they had made them uniquely their own. For example, they had come to identify Our Lord Jesus Christ with their ancient deity Tayau, the sun god. . . . They took elements from the story of Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection and made them into a ceremony apparently designed to ensure the renewal and continuity of their communal life.¹³

In the Cora play a boy of about seven plays Christ. There is no Pilate, no Judas. The villains are called *borrados*, which means "erased ones" in Spanish. The borrados are the Judeans responsible for the crucifixion. For the three days of the festival "all authority, civil and religious, passes to a man called the Captain of the Judeans. He and his borrados—young men of the region—darken themselves with soot and mud and thus 'erase' their own personalities and their personal responsibility for whatever they do." Fortified with peyote, the borrados hold forth for three days and nights. The crucifixion is preceded by a chase through the town with the boy-Christ doing his best to get away from the borrados. He is helped by a wooden cross that he brandishes. "Three times—in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—the borrados chased the boy, and three times they fell writhing to the ground at the sight of the cross." Then they catch him, tie him, and bring him to the church. There women groom him, and he sleeps overnight. The next morning he is brought out by the borrados and made to stand in front of a cross in the churchyard. This is the crucifixion. The next day at noon

¹³ Guillermo E. Aldana's extraordinary *National Geographic* article (June, 1971), "Mesa del Nayar's Strange Holy Week," has many unforgettable photographs. All quotations are from Aldana's article.

the village governor arrives on horseback. He plays the role of the centurion. He rides among the borrados and breaks their bamboo spears. They fall dead to the ground and then get up, go to the stream, and take a purifying bath. "Near the church all was mirth and happiness." Many things are interesting about the Cora play: how it is integrated into the life of the village, the changes made in the traditional Christ story, the double quality of drama and initiation ritual.

The Central Highlands of New Guinea provides the fifth model of using space. Catherine Berndt observed an all-night ceremony and noted the changes that occurred in a large open field.¹⁴ "At first there were district clusters of dancers, although the edges of the clusters blur as people greet kin, attend to ovens, or rest on the sidelines." The blurring continues leading to wholesale intermingling "until it becomes impossible to distinguish groups. Nevertheless, a certain nucleus is likely to resist this tendency to disperse." Finally, as the time to set off for home approaches, "the various units reform (though less compactly than before) and set off."



This is not unlike what happens at party—except that in New Guinea the gathering is the occasion for performances of farces, dances, and songs. These are ornately costumed and often carefully staged.

Is the New Guinea use of space more "primitive" than the Egyptian? The New Guinea use suits New Guinea ceremonial events which are also informal social gatherings like parties.

¹⁴ Quotations and drawings from Berndt (1959).

The Egyptian use suits the great formality and impressive scale of the Heb-Sed. What the environmentalist learns in studying these examples—and many others—is that space-time-action is a single, flexible unit. The first obstacle to environmental design is preconception. The great enemy of preconception is a knowledge of cultures and periods other than one's own.

Thus far I've spoken of environmental design abstractly. I've said that it is related to body spaces, space-senses, and space-fields, but I have not been concrete in showing how. For one thing environmental design practice is ahead of theory. This is true partly because there are so many extraordinary examples of environmental design if we simply open our eyes to see. Whether the environmentalist looks at American Indian, Asian, Oceanic, African, Siberian, or Eskimo societies, he finds many models that may stimulate his creativity. Also he can look back in history as far as he can—to Altamira and the other caves; and then forward to Egypt, the Near and Middle East, Asia, and medieval Europe. In our own day he can study productions like Ludovico Ronconi's *Orlando Furioso*, Gilbert Moses' and Archie Shepp's *Slave Ship* (designed by Eugene Lee), Peter Brook's *Tempest* and *Orghast*, the work of Jerzy Grotowski, and the extraordinary work of Peter Schumann and the Bread and Puppet Theater.

What all of these works past and present, dramatic and ritual, in industrial and nonindustrial societies have in common is that they each create or use whole space. Whether it is *Orghast* or Robert Wilson's *KA MOUNTAIN* and *GUARDENIA TERRACE* set amid the ruins of Persepolis and the mountains near Shiraz, or the Heb-Sed on the Nile, or an initiation rite that starts in a village, moves to a road leading to the river, climaxes along the riverbanks, and concludes back in the village, or *Akropolis* with its environment being built out of stovepipes during the performance, or a pig-kill and dance at Kurumugl in New Guinea—each example is of an event whose expression in space is a complete statement of what the event is.

Sometimes the space is broken into many spaces. Sometimes the audience is given a special place to watch from. Sometimes the space is treated fluidly, changing during the performance. Sometimes nothing is done to the space. The thing about environmental theater space is not just a matter of how you end up using space. It is an attitude. *Start with all the space there is and then decide what to use, what not to use, and how to use what you use.*

Work on *Makbeth* began in October, 1968, with workshops exploring Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. We did a lot of exercises about prophesy, laying on hands, witchcraft. We took the text apart and reassembled it in funny ways. We tried to find the main threads of action from both an individual and a group point of view. In December we had Rojo and McNamara down to the Garage. Both of them sat in on workshops and talk. Many models of the environment were proposed. We selected, finally, Rojo's—but did not discard McNamara's. After modification it became the *Makbeth Maze*: the way into the theater from the second floor of the Garage. The Maze was a bit of Madame Toussaud, a bit of fun house, scraps of theater history, mirrors, and information about the performance. It ended at an open hole in the floor, a narrow descent into *Makbeth's* hell.¹⁵

The *mise-en-scène* for *Makbeth* was worked out in six phases, the environment in five.

Mise-en-scène

1. October, 1968–February, 1969. Improvisations without keeping to Shakespeare's text. Search for basic actions, basic movement patterns. First determination of space-field as "cabin'd, cribb'd, and confin'd."

2. March–June, 1969. Making of scenes not in Shakespeare. These expressed some actual situations in the Group. Using Shakespeare's text as raw material. Demystifying Shakespeare. First character groupings: Dark Powers, Founders, Doers, Avengers.

3. July–August, 1969. Cast assignments. Decisions about the shape of the space, the nature of the music. Much work with Rojo and Epstein. End of group workshops. I worked alone assembling what we had into a coherent script.

4. September, 1969. Rehearsals in Baocic, Yugoslavia, while Rojo built the environment in the Garage. Composition of music by Epstein in Philadelphia.

5. October–November, 1969. Rehearsals in the Garage.

¹⁵ The New Orleans Group had something similar in the lobby for *Victims of Duty* in 1967. The exhibit was mounted on billboards and contained hundreds of photos, newspaper articles, letters, birth certificates, and other personal crap dealing with the private lives of the performers and directors—a takeoff on the trivia in theater programs. Also there was a short film, slides, and taped music counterpointing the Tulane NROTC band with Hitler marches. During the performance the exhibit was changed so that when the audience left, people were forced to duck under a sheet on which was written the famous Eichmann quotation: "I am a victim of the actions of others and obedience to duty." From the ceiling hung pictures of Eichmann all neat in his uniform.

Revision of script. Integration of music into the production. Opening.

6. December, 1969–January, 1970. Run. Few changes except tightening. Closing.

The second phase of work didn't yield an acceptable performance text, but it gave performers a handle on the language. The work overcame the scared feelings people have when first approaching sacred Shakespeare. Also the second phase made it clear how to organize the story and divide the roles.

Environment

1. October, 1968–February, 1969. Rojo, McNamara, and I discussed the themes of the play and possibilities for the environment. They came to a few workshops.

2. March–May, 1969. Rojo and McNamara attended Wednesday night workshops devoted to text construction and environment. Drawings and models, many rejected ideas including ziggurats, corrals, and wire fences. Finally, Rojo's design is accepted, and McNamara's is transformed into the Maze.

3. June–August, 1969. Construction of working models. Decision to move Maze upstairs and use it as the way into the environment downstairs. Approval of final building plans before my departure for Yugoslavia in August. Also approval of costumes.

4. September, 1969. Construction of about 90 percent of the environment while the Group rehearsed in Yugoslavia.

5. October, 1969. Completion of environment, lighting, costumes.

The big mistake with *Makbeth* was that we rehearsed it in Baocic, and the space-field of that outdoor meadow stayed with us. It was impossible to work effectively in the Garage environment. The Yugoslavian rehearsals broke in two our work on the play; and yet the rehearsals in Yugoslavia gave us the fundamental scenic actions. The production could not survive the contradiction. Ultimately the magnificent Garage environment was alien to a *mise-en-scène* worked out in Yugoslavia.

The Baocic meadow was large; performers looked across at adversaries who could be seen but not heard. There was a limitless ceiling of sky, the play of natural light, the sweet smell of clean air. In the meadow the Dark Powers transformed into birds hiding in the trees or woodchucks in the underbrush. The *Makbeths* lived atop a knoll near a large tree. Malcolm and

Macduff, after the murder of their father, Duncan, took a long semicircular route through forests and shrubs to get at the Makbeths. I directed by running from one side of the meadow to another, ducking behind trees or rocks, flattened on my belly in the grass, watching, yelling directions, just keeping up with the action. I saw Banquo, trapped by the Dark Powers in a blind alley of shrubbery, vainly struggle before they bashed her head in with a rock. I hid nearby as the Dark Powers lured Makbeth into a dusky gully cut by a brook and whispered to him that he would never be slain by a man of woman born. I watched as Malcolm and Macduff, assisted by the Dark Powers, camouflaged themselves with grass and branches and advanced on Dunsinane. Only a few of these scenes were translatable into the Garage environment. The long, deep pit against the north wall served well as the gully-home of the Dark Powers; Banquo was trapped amid the wood columns supporting the environment; the advancing Malcolm and Macduff darted from column to column as in a forest as they approached Dunsinane. But the amplitude of the Baocic meadow could not be stuffed into Rojo's magnificent Garage environment. Furthermore, this amplitude did not suit the play we started the previous winter in New York.

What happened during the month's rehearsals in Baocic was that the performers developed the action according to the space-field there while Rojo built from what he perceived from workshops. The space-field of Baocic contradicted the space-field of Rojo's environment. Disunity within the Group made it impossible to overcome or live with this contradiction. We could not use it creatively. I remember William Finley saying, when he first saw the Garage, "It's great, really marvelous, but how do we work in it?" I panicked and resorted to blocking. Instead of taking the time to let the performers feel their way around, through, and into the space, I imposed actions and rhythms. Throughout its run *Makbeth* never felt at home in the Garage. I hope I've learned the lesson: *Text, action, and environment must develop together.*

Rojo's environment had one supreme quality: It incorporated the tensions he sensed in the Group, conflicts that led to the dissolution of TPG early in 1970. The rehearsals of *Makbeth* coincided with the undoing of the Group. Daily, heavy personal things came down, and although no one said so out loud, I think we each knew that *Makbeth* was our last play together. Because of the way TPG works, our conflicts fed into the structure of *Makbeth*. It became an angry play of blood, power

struggles, betrayals, fleeting contacts, brief flashes of quiet punctuated by screams. All of this is in Shakespeare's script. It also characterized the environment. Gone were the soft carpets and suffused lighting of *Dionysus* replaced by a concrete floor, bare wood platforms framed by iron piping, lighting that came in fitful bursts. The bare feet of *Dionysus* gave way to boxing shoes, nakedness to unisex costumes of crushed corduroy.

It was better with *Commune*. Rojo and I met during the spring of 1970 to talk over the play while it was in its very early stages. He visited New Paltz several times during the summer to watch workshops and present and revise his drawings and models. Sculptor Robert Adzema made several models that were helpful in getting the environment together. Everyone in the Group went over the models and made suggestions. At the end of July the Wave was built in New Paltz, and we rehearsed with it for the rest of the summer. We appropriated scaffolding and built an approximation of the environment Rojo was designing. He saw enough rehearsals to change his plans according to what was happening to the play. There were weekly open rehearsals to see how the audience reacted to the environment. By the end of August a plan was agreed on, and during September while TPG and Wave were in residence at Goddard, Rojo built about one third of the environment in the Garage. In October we did a few open rehearsals in the Garage working in the partially finished environment. Rojo learned from watching us work. He completed the environment in October while the Group was on tour—still with the Wave, our cumbersome environmental security blanket. When the Group returned to New York in November, everyone pitched in to paint the Garage. We painted the ceiling sky blue and the walls desert red-brown. The environment was finished. Later, during performances, spectators—given chalk—added much interesting graffiti.

Some of the graffiti is still on the ceiling, even for *The Tooth of Crime*. And lumber, fittings, scraps of every environment ever built in the Garage comprise part of whatever is most current. This is not only a matter of economy. Like new cities built on the rubble and from the rubble of older ones, the present recapitulates and transforms the past: There is a tangible tradition in the Garage.

There is no such thing as a standard environmental design. A standard design mocks the basic principle: *The event, the performers, the environmentalist, the director, and the audience interacting with each other in a space (or spaces) determine the*

environment. Having said that, I offer a "standard environmental design." A theater ought to offer to each spectator the chance to find his own place. There ought to be *jumping-off places* where spectators can physically enter the performance; there ought to be *regular places* where spectators can arrange themselves more or less as they would in an orthodox theater—this helps relieve the anxieties some people feel when entering an environmental theater; there ought to be *vantage points* where people can get out of the way of the main action and look at it with detachment; there ought to be *pinnacles, dens, and hutches*: extreme places far up, far back, and deep down where spectators can dangle or burrow or vanish. At most levels there ought to be places where people can be alone, be together with one or two others, or be with a fairly large group. Spaces ought to be open enough so that in most of them people can stand, sit, lean, or lie down as the mood directs. Spaces ought to open to each other so that spectators can see each other and move from one place to another. The overall feel of the theater ought to be of a place where choices can be made. The feel I get from a successful environment is that of a *global space*, a microcosm, with flow, contact, and interaction.

This long list of "ought to be's" is obliterated by the specific needs of a production. None of the TPG environments meets all of these "requirements."

As the environmentalist works, particularly if he is new at the game, he should ask himself questions. These questions are implicit in the work, different from questions an orthodox designer might ask.

1. Does the mass, volume, and rhythm of the whole environment express the play? Not the play as I abstractly conceive it, but as I have watched it develop in rehearsals?
2. Does the material out of which the environment is built—texture, weight, color, density, feel—express the play?
3. Can spectators see each other? Can they hide from each other? Can they stand, sit, lean, lie down? Can they be alone, in small groups, in larger groups?
4. Are there places to look down on most of the action, to look across at it, to look up to it?
5. Where are the places for performing? How are they connected to each other? How many places are used both by the audience and by the performers?
6. Are there efficient ways of moving up and down as well as in all horizontal directions?

7. What does the environment sound like? How does it smell?

8. Can every surface and supporting member safely hold as many people as can crowd onto it? Are there at least two ways in and out of every space?

The thing about safety is that nothing should be disguised. If a ladder is hard to climb, make it look like it's hard to climb. In five years working in the Garage there have been no major accidents and only a few scrapes and sprains. The worst that's happened has been a broken foot that occurred to William Shephard when he made a spectacular leap changing his course in midair to avoid demolishing a spectator.

The environmentalist is not trying to create the illusion of a place; he wants to create a functioning space. This space will be used by many different kinds of people, not only the performers. The stage designer is often concerned with effect: how does it *look* from the house? The environmentalist is concerned with structure and use: how does it *work*? Often the stage designer's set is used from a distance—don't touch this, don't stand on that—but everything the environmentalist builds must work. Stage designing is two-dimensional, a kind of propped-up painting. Environmental design is strictly three-dimensional. If it's there, it's got to work. This leads to sparseness.

Have you ever thought how *stupid* the proscenium theater is architecturally? Start with the auditorium, the "house." A silly name for row after row of regularly arranged seats—little properties that spectators rent for a few hours. Nothing here of the freedom of arrangement in a house where people live—and can push the furniture around. And most of the places in the "house" are disadvantageous for seeing or hearing. The first few rows are so close that the actors—in their effort to project to the back and up to the balconies—spit all over you; the seats to the side give a fun-house mirror view of the stage, all pulled out of proportion; the seats at the back of the orchestra under the balcony are claustrophobic and acoustically murder; the view from the second balcony makes the stage look like a flea circus. Only a few seats in the orchestra, mezzanine, and first balcony offer anything like a pleasing view of the stage. But this is no surprise. The proscenium theater was originally designed to emphasize differences in class and wealth. It was meant to have very good seats, medium seats, poor seats, and very bad seats.

When people come late or leave early, they all but step on you, push their asses in your face, and disrupt whole rows of spectators. There is no chance to readjust your body, take a seventh-inning stretch, or extend your arms. During intermission everyone runs to the lobby to gobble food, drink, smoke, talk. Intermission is just about the only human thing going on. Also, of course, to see who's here—which undeniably is one of theater's chiefest and oldest joys. Not just to look at or for famous people—but to look over the crowd, see who's out with you this evening. This looking is impossible in the darkened house that cruelly makes you focus straight ahead, as in church or at school, at a performance that, finally, may not interest you at all.

The worst thing about the "house" is that it imprisons you away from the stage where there are many interesting things to see if you were only allowed. What's visible of the stage from the house is only a fraction of its total area and volume. For me the wonderful direction is up. To gaze up into the flies through rods and curtains and lights and ropes and catwalks and galleries into the immense space! Whenever TPG is asked to perform in a proscenium, I accept with enthusiasm. "Bring everyone on stage," I say, "and turn a few lights upward so that people can see how high the flies are." Also in newer theaters there are vast chambers to the left and right of the playing stage, and often behind the playing area, too. These are for "wagons," a term as old as medieval theater, meaning rolling platforms on which whole sets are built and then brought into place. And sometimes there is a turntable—a device Brecht loved. Usually there are trapdoors leading to a cellar under the stage, and doors going to the backstage, the shop, the dressing rooms, the greenroom. So the proscenium stage is a focused space surrounded on every side by other spaces attending on the stage like an old queen. How mean that audiences should be exiled from this royal realm of magic. Such exclusion is pitiable, cheap, unfair, and unnecessary.

My own preference is to do away with most of the machinery. It makes the theater worker like a soldier trapped inside his burning tank. But I would keep the spaces—the overs, unders, and arounds.

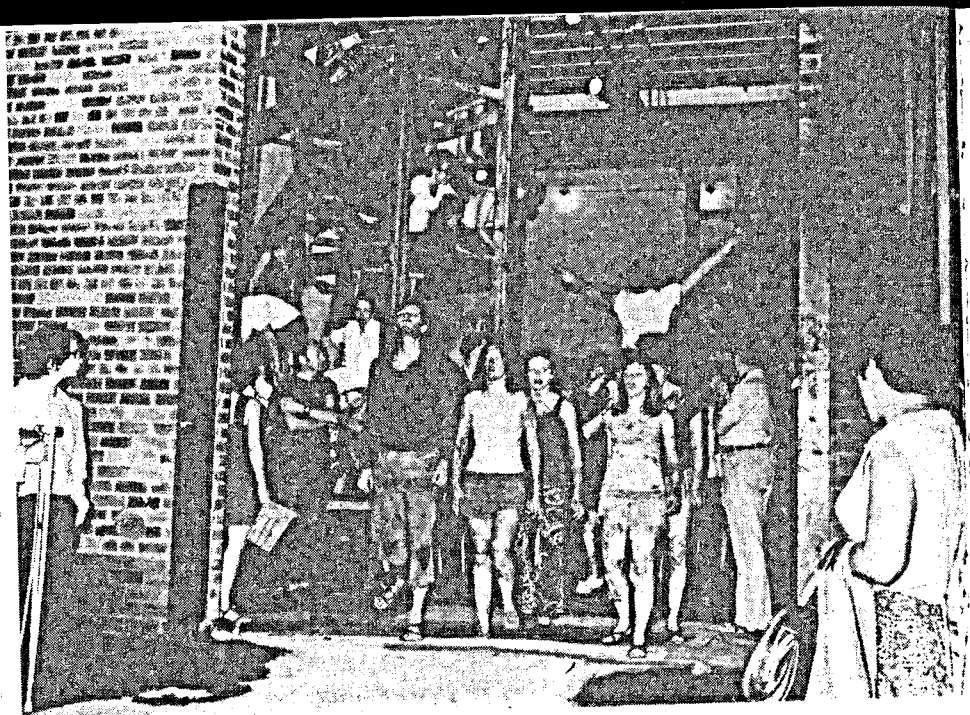
Some new theaters designed by people who want to keep up to date try to keep "the best" from previous ages. These theaters are like old trees weighted down by so many branches that they break. Such a theater is the brand-new job at the University of Rhode Island, where TPG was in residence in the summer of

1971. The theater wasn't even open to the public when I saw it. In the semicircular arrangement of seats in the house is the Greek amphitheater, in the vomitoria leading from the house to the foot of the orchestra pit is the Roman stadium, in the space for wagons are the medieval moralities and pageants, in the fly system are the Italian scenic conventions of the Renaissance, in the slightly thrust stage is the Elizabethan theater, in the proscenium posts is the eighteenth-century theater, in the orchestra pit is the nineteenth-century opera, in the turntable is the early twentieth-century, in the bank after bank of computerized lighting controls are contemporary electronics. Pity the poor student actor!

When the Group took one look at this monster, we decided to work in the scene shop—an honest, large, irregular space that could be made into anything. Not by building scenery or pushing buttons, but by putting down a plywood floor we could dance and run and jump on, some scaffolds to climb over, a few velours to soak up extra noise, and fewer than twenty lights to make it bright enough to see. The rest is performing.

The simple fact that in most theaters actors enter through their own door at one time and audience enters through another door at a later time architecturally expresses a strong aesthetic and class consciousness. The separate doors are entrances literally to different worlds. The stage door leads to all the equipment and facilities backstage. This stuff is not at all dressed up. Layers of paint, raw pipes, old scenery, costume racks, lights, wires, tools, are all laid out in ways that facilitate use and accessibility. Except on the stage things are arranged according to systems that make for easy indexing and use. On the stage, of course, things are arranged for the audience's eyes. The audience enters the theater door into a plush, often ornate, and stylish lobby. This is so even off off-Broadway where, in their own way, the lobbies are modish. The house itself is as plush as the producers can afford to make it. From the house the audience views the stage where an illusion has been created. From the front the stage presents its false but pretty face. From backstage the scenery is ugly (if you like illusions) but working—supports, nails, ropes, and wires are visible—and the view of the stage from behind or the sides reminds me of nothing so much as a ship: a lot of equipment focused in a small space.

What if the audience and the actors were to enter through the



Photographs 9 and 10. Taking *Dionysus* out into Wooster Street—exploding the space of the theater (Frederick Eberstadt)

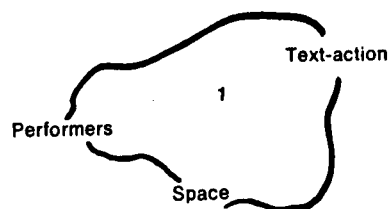


same door at the same time? What if all the equipment of the theater, however arranged, were available to public view at all times? What if we eliminated the distinctions between backstage and onstage, house and stage, stage door and theater door? No theater that I know of has done this, not absolutely. Once in Vancouver in August, 1972, TPG experimented with a "real-time" performance of *Commune*. I announced to our workshop and to some university classes that anyone would be welcome to come to the theater at 6 P.M.—at the time of the performers' call. About ten students showed up, and they entered the theater together with the performers. The visitors were free to go wherever they pleased. They watched warmups, listened to notes, helped the tech director check the lights, set the props, fill the tub, clean up the theater. They watched the performers put on their costumes and saw the regular audience arrive at 7:45. Then the performance. After, the routine of closing up the theater for the night: removing costumes and putting them in the laundry bag for washing, re-collecting props, emptying the tub, and all the other routines of ending. Out of the ten students only two or three stuck for the whole process that was over about 10:30. (*Commune* itself takes only about ninety minutes.) The performers were a little uneasy at their presence for warmups and notes. After the performance no one minded who was there. I felt funny, too, and performed a little for the "real-time" audience. I wanted them to have a good time. Removing the "magic" from theater won't be easy.

A further experiment in this line is part of *The Tooth of Crime* production. Performers man the box office, greet spectators as they enter the theater, explain aspects of the production: particularly the fact that spectators can get as close to a scene as they wish by moving throughout the theater during the entire performance. At intermission performers prepare and sell coffee, talk to spectators, socialize, and let everyone know when the second act is beginning. The difference between show time and intermission is clear, but there is no attempt made at hiding the non-performing life performers lead even in the midst of a night at theater. Strikingly enough, I find that the performers' concentration on their work and the audience's interest in the story is not at all diminished by the socializing. If anything, the playing of the play is enhanced. Roles are seen as emerging from a full constellation of activities that include economics, logistics, hostings, and one-to-

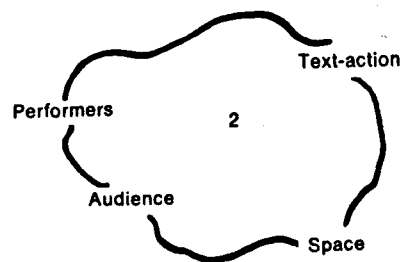
one relationships. The performers are seen not as the magic people of the story but as the people who *play* the story.

When I design an environment, I try to take into account the space-senses of the performers, of the text-action, and of the space we're working in. These make an irregular circle, an interconnected system that is always changing.



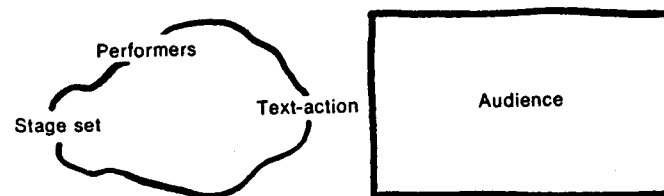
In time the space gets set as the environment is built. Or doesn't get set. The finest thing about *Orlando Furioso* was the way the environment itself kept changing because the environment was the audience. As the big set pieces crawled or hurtled across the floor, the audience scattered or followed. I climbed a lighting tower and looked down from about twenty feet. Not knowing Italian helped me concentrate on the changing figures of movement. I thought I detected a pattern. For gentle, quiet scenes the audience pressed in, heads and shoulders forward. Running away from a careening platform, they seemed to run in front of it instead of to the sides as one might expect. In other words, they challenged the platform to run them down—they played a game with the platform. They stood back from declamations, with hips thrust forward, head and shoulders back.

Once the audience is let into the environment, the basic relationship is changed. There are four points on the circle.



This is as simple as ABC except that in orthodox theater the audience is outside the circle. Fixed seating, lighting design, architecture: Everything is clearly meant to exclude the audience

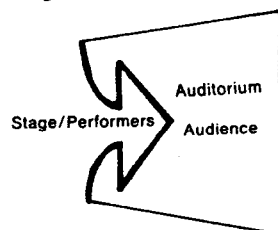
from any kind of participation in the action. Even their watching is meant to be ignored. The spectators are put into the semi-fetal prison of a chair, and no matter what they feel, it will be hard to physicalize and express those feelings.



I don't see any middle ground. Either the audience is in it or they are out of it. Either there is potential for *contact* or there is not. I don't deny that the spectator in the orthodox theater feels something. Sure he does. *But he cannot easily, naturally, unconsciously, and without embarrassment express those feelings except within idiotically limited limits.*

When we say of a great performer that he or she has *presence*, that we are *moved* by the performance, that we have been *touched*, we are not speaking nonsense or entirely metaphorically. Many times I've seen an audience collectively catch its breath, shift position, become very still, change their points of contact and orientation to each other, or to the performers, quite unconsciously, without thought or intention. These changes in body positions, in expressive poses—the way a person fronts himself (or sidles, or turns his shoulder, or his back) on another—on an action is a delightful part of every performance in an environmental theater. The theater ought architecturally to offer a rich field for this kind of communication—not only to occur but to be observed by whoever has eyes for it. The orthodox theater lets the audience see the actors making this kind of movement. But what about letting spectators see spectators and performers see spectators? Such open architecture encourages a contact that is continuous, subtle, fluid, pervasive, and unconscious. Lovely.

Three major tendencies of contemporary Western theater are exemplified by the ways audiences are arranged and treated. In the orthodox theater, including so-called open stages, such as arenas, thrust stages, and calipter stages, the stage is brightly lit and active; from it information flows into the darkened auditorium where the audience is arranged in regular seats. Feedback from the house to the stage is limited.



ORTHODOX

Stage
bright
active
giving
noisy
irregular arrangement
costumed
magic space

Auditorium
dark
passive
taking
quiet
regular arrangement
everyday dress
plain space

Confrontation theater, as in the Living Theatre's *Paradise Now*, uses orthodox theater space for unorthodox ends. Many local scenes or confrontations take place both on the stage and in the auditorium. The traditional uses of stage and house are frequently inverted. The aim of confrontation theater is to provoke the audience into participating or at least to make people feel very uncomfortable about not participating. Confrontational theater is a transitional form depending heavily on an *épater le bourgeois* attitude and the need among the bourgeois to experience suffering as a relief of guilt.

Stage
bright
active
giving-taking
noisy
irregular arrangement

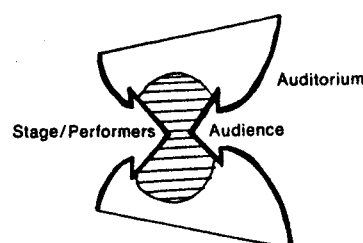
usually in street clothes,
sometimes naked

magic space made plain

Auditorium
alternately bright and dark
forced into activity
taking-giving
noisy
regular arrangement changed
by attempts to use the
whole space

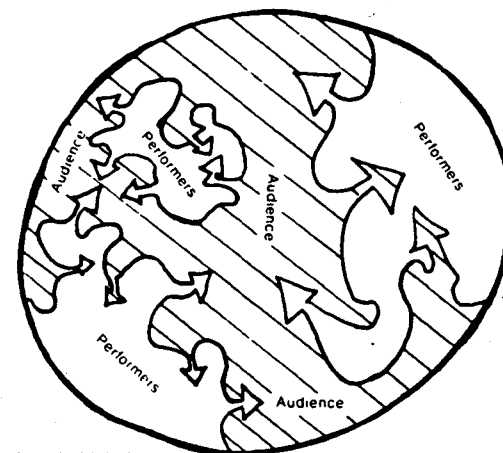
usually in street clothes, but
sometimes provoked to
nakedness or exchange of
clothes

plain space made magic



CONFRONTATION

Environmental theater encourages give-and-take throughout a globally organized space in which the areas occupied by the audience are a kind of sea through which the performers swim; and the performance areas are kinds of islands or continents in the midst of the audience. The audience does not sit in regularly arranged rows; there is one whole space rather than two opposing spaces. The environmental use of space is fundamentally *collaborative*; the action flows in many directions sustained only by the cooperation of performers and spectators. Environmental theater design is a reflection of the communal nature of this kind of theater. The design encourages participation; it is also a reflection of the wish for participation. There are no settled sides automatically dividing the audience off against the performers.



ENVIRONMENTAL

I end this chapter by proposing a few principles of environmental design. These have all been discussed. I gather them as a way of easy reference and summary.

1. For each production the whole space is designed.
2. The design takes into account space-senses and space-fields.
3. Every part of the environment is functional.
4. The environment evolves along with the play it embodies.
5. The performer is included in all phases of planning and building.

People are frightened of theatre because it is the nearest thing to talking and touching each other, which is the deepest flash: In the ladder of artificiality, theatre is on the lowest rung.
Heathcote Williams

To imitate another successfully requires a cooperative audience; the actor establishes an agreement with his audience to attend to certain aspects of a performance. That agreement is seldom open and explicit. In fact, it is often so embedded in the conventionalized context as to be as difficult to analyze as the signal behavior itself.
Ray L. Birdwhistell

2 Participation

What happens to a performance when the usual agreements between performer and spectator are broken? What happens when performers and spectators actually make contact? When they talk to each other and touch? Crossing the boundaries between theater and politics, art and life, performance event and social event, stage and auditorium? Audience participation expands the field of what a performance is, because *audience participation takes place precisely at the point where the performance breaks down and becomes a social event*. In other words, participation is incompatible with the idea of a self-contained, autonomous, beginning-middle-and-end artwork.

The Performance Group didn't talk much about audience participation while preparing *Dionysus in 69*. As we worked, more scenes needed the active collaboration of the audience, and soon nearly all of the play was open to the audience. In any given night we could expect spectators to join in the performance at one point or another. The most extraordinary participatory moments happened when people came to the theater in groups, or when individuals gave over to the performance so fully that for the duration of the performance they joined the Group as if they were members.

One night a bunch of students from Queens College kidnapped Pentheus, preventing his sacrifice to Dionysus. As they seized him, William Shephard, playing Pentheus, went limp, and Jason Bosseau, playing Dionysus, jumped between the students and the theater door. A fierce argument raged between Bosseau/Dionysus and the students.

"You came here with a plan all worked out!" he shouted. They agreed and said, "Why not?"

Arguments broke out among many spectators not a few of whom thought the whole thing was rigged by the Group. This contingent cynically whined, "Come on now, we've had enough of this, get on with the play we paid money to see!" Finally Pentheus was carried from the theater and unceremoniously dumped on Grand Street. He refused to come back and resume his performance. "I was taken out of it and that's that." Bosseau went upstairs and only returned when he was assured that the play was ready to go on. The disruption was mended when I asked for a volunteer Pentheus from the audience. A sixteen-year-old boy who had seen the play five times took the role of Pentheus. He was instructed by the performers and me concerning his tasks, and he improvised his lines.

For some performers and spectators the conclusion of the play that night had a rare poignancy; for others there was the bitter taste of a double betrayal; first by Shephard/Pentheus for letting himself be carried out of the theater and then by me for yielding to my impulse to finish the show "by any means necessary." I remember my confusion after the performance. The Group was upstairs scrubbing off stage blood and arguing with spectators, including the Queens College "kidnappers." I was elated that something "real" had happened. I didn't think it was wrong that the students planned their actions. After all, if the performers rehearse, why shouldn't the audience? And I was excited by the aftermath: the discussions, the confrontations, the meeting between performers and spectators on new ground. At that time I didn't know the depth of hurt and anger that some performers felt.

Most participations in *Dionysus* were not the result of well-laid plans. Not infrequently spectators spontaneously stripped and took part in the Death Ritual. These people already knew what was expected of them from seeing the Birth Ritual; and they identified strongly with Pentheus, or his murderers. Spectators always allowed themselves to be caressed in the scene that precedes the Death Ritual. More than once a spectator responded



Photograph 11. Participation in the Caress scene of *Dionysus*. The performers are the women in panties and halters. Everyone else is audience. After three months the scene was dropped. Too often performers—especially the women—felt used, prostituted. (Raeanne Rubenstein)

with more ardor than a performer bargained for. (The entire problem of sexuality and participation will be discussed later.) Parts of the play—such as the Tag Chorus and the Ecstasy Dance following the birth of Dionysus—were easy to participate in simply by singing, clapping, or dancing, and each night nearly everyone took part in one or both of these scenes.

Underlying much participation in *Dionysus* was the wish of spectators to get closer to the Group as a group. Many spectators

thought TPG was a community, even a religious community. Audiences did not want to think of *Dionysus in 69* as “just a play.” And in many of its techniques *Dionysus* was not only different from an orthodox play, but *more* than an orthodox play. However, in retrospect, I know that often people were projecting—they wanted to find a community, so they found one in us. But there’s more to it than that. The opportunity for authentic interaction with the performers made it true that *Dionysus* was not an orthodox play (that is, a finished thing, a self-contained event) but life (an organic, unfinished thing, an open event). The audience brought their old aesthetics to *Dionysus*. When they saw these did not fit, they didn’t formulate a new aesthetics—instead they concluded that the play was not a play but life.

Many who saw *Dionysus* thought it was a celebration of our own religion and that the symbolic events of the play—the birth, taunting, orgies, torture, and killing—were a kind of new Mass; participating in *Dionysus in 69* was a way of performing an arcane ritual in the catacombs of Wooster Street. The audience was not altogether wrong. Members of the Group shared the needs of the audience. What the audience projected onto the play was matched by what the players projected back onto the audience. We all assumed a religion, if we had none.

The performance was often trans-theatrical in a way that could not last, because American society in 1969 was not actually communal. *Dionysus* was overwhelming to the degree that audiences believed it was not a play and found that belief confirmed by the Group. This belief in the play’s actuality was corroborated by its participatory elements. Joining in *Dionysus*—like declaring for Christ at a revival meeting—was an act of the body publicly signaling one’s faith. Participation and belief supported each other—on any given night the strength of feeling created by joining participation to belief could be such that everything else was swept away.

But, as Euripides himself reminds us in *The Bacchae*, “we are not gods, but men.” The great Dionysian circle was an evasion of the circumstances in the streets of New York. It was an evasion of the circumstances within the Group. Arguments flamed concerning whether the Group was a theater or a community. Looking back from three years’ distance, I see now that the arguments were beside the point. The real question was: Would we acquiesce in being a function of the audience’s fantasies? Were we to become one of the first theaters to reverse the old arrangement—no longer would the illusion originate on stage

and be sustained by the audience; the illusion was now originating with the audience and enhanced by the performers.

TPG was not then to become a community. And the basis for audience participation changed because the Group could not survive intact as a function of the audience's fantasies. During the winter of 1968–1969 the Group began weekly encounter therapy sessions guided by professional therapists. These sessions helped members recognize that the Group was not a community, nor did it seem headed in that direction. Certain irresolvable conflicts surfaced, and irreconcilable differences emerged. One member called these therapy sessions the “weekly tear and mucous meetings.” As members got deeper into group therapy, the therapeutic scenes in *Dionysus* were modified and finally dropped. Participation grew tamer and more predictable. Performers began to resent participation especially when it broke the rhythms of what had been carefully rehearsed. By the time *Dionysus* in 69 closed at the end of July, 1969, most of the performers had had it with participation.

Two points should be made clear regarding the participation in *Dionysus*. First, participation occurred at those points where the play stopped being a play and became a social event—when spectators felt that they were free to enter the performance as equals. At these times the themes of the play—its “literary values”—were advanced not textually but wholly through action; or the themes were not advanced at all but set aside so that something else could happen. And just about everything did happen at one time or another—from a young male model dancing in his jockstrap around the Birth Ritual distributing business cards with his name and phone number, to passionate denunciations of the Vietnam war. For spectators who participated, performers were no longer actors but people doing what they believed in, “spontaneously.” It was impossible for most people to acknowledge that the attributes of “actor” and “person” were not mutually exclusive. The second point is that most of the participation in *Dionysus* was according to the democratic model: letting people into the play to do as the performers were doing, to “join the story.” This was all the easier in *Dionysus* because the story is clear and simple and because the performers did not display skills popularly identified with acting. The Group did not try to impersonate, or speak in fancy tones. (Fully trained bodies were not identified with acting by most spectators, and so the superb body work of the performers didn’t put anyone off.) In short, participation in *Dionysus* didn’t mean acting-like-actors-do

but believing-in-what-The-Performance-Group-believes, and “acting spontaneously” from those beliefs.

Before going ahead, let me review. I began by asserting that participation takes place at the precise point where the performance breaks down—is broken down. It is hard to talk about participation because participation is not about “doing a play” but *undoing* it, transforming an aesthetic event into a social event—or shifting the focus from art-and-illusion to the potential or actual solidarity among everyone in the theater, performers and spectators alike. The orthodox view of aesthetics insists on an autonomous, self-contained (separate) drama performed by one group of people who are watched by another group. The architecture and conventions of the orthodox theater strongly enforces these aesthetics. However, I also said that participation is such a powerful intrusion into this orthodox scheme, that in the face of participation we must reconsider the very foundations of orthodox aesthetics: illusion, mimesis, the physical separation of audience and performers, the creation of a symbolic time and place.

Why has audience participation appeared at this moment in Western theater history, reintroducing methods that have been dormant since medieval times? Because participation is extra-aesthetic (according to orthodox aesthetics), the answer cannot be found in aesthetics. The theater is a particularly sensitive measurement of social feeling and action. It is also a holdout, technologically speaking: the last of the hand-crafted entertainments. In society in general, and in entertainment in particular the movement is to self-contained, electronically processed, unresponsive systems—closed systems on which the individual can have little effect. Shout as you will at the TV set, Johnny Carson does not hear you. And even the phone-in programs have the famous “five-second delay,” giving the broadcaster absolute control over what goes out over the air. Closed, one-way systems are inherently oppressive. They are even more maliciously so when they wear the costume of openness, as so much of “media programming” does. Orthodox theater is much more open than TV or films but much more closed than environmental theater. Environmental theater’s attempts at audience participation are both last-ditch stands, and tentative first-tries at creating and enhancing entertainment, art, and actual situations by opening the system, making feedback not only possible but delightful.

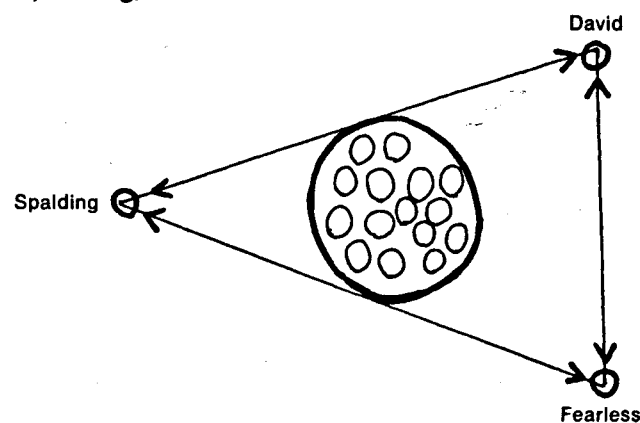
Opening the closed circle occurs by democratizing the performance, as in *Dionysus*, or by making sure that continuous

change and indeterminacy is part of the whole process of theater-making, as TPG tried to do in *Commune*. There are scenes in *Commune* that need the audience in order to be played. No one is let into the theater unless he/she takes off his/her shoes. The first action of the play (in one of its versions) is a police line-up in which performers stand amid spectators who are selected for the line-up randomly. Standing on the Wave, the fifteen people look more or less alike. Then Lizzie steps from the line-up, stands on the edge of the Tub, and picks out the performers. As she identifies each one, he/she takes a step forward. When all have been identified, Lizzie says: "They're the ones, they did it." Next is the March to Death Valley—a circle dance around the whole theater that can end only when the circle has been made, and to make a circle, at least fifteen or more spectators must join the dance. There have been times, when the house is small, that everyone joins the dance, and the circle is small. Throughout *Commune* there are moments—some seen by everyone and some rather private—in which individual spectators, or groups, are needed to further the action of the play.

The inflexible rule that everyone remove their shoes upon entering the theater has stirred every feeling from indifferent compliance to delight to bitter anger and cynicism. Critics can't understand how this gesture "liberates" them—so simple-minded is their cliché identification of the new theater with "liberation," that every gesture must be instantly translated into some signal of "freedom." Libertarians protest against the "fascistic" demand of giving up one's *private* property. Few of these same people protest that TPG charges an admission price, making our whole performances private, limited property. Some people say that because they have paid for their tickets, they should not have to take their shoes off. The fastidious have assured me that the indelicate odors of bare and stockinged feet are all that has prevented them from seeing *Commune*. For me, the significance of taking off shoes is multiple. It is an actual gesture of collaboration focusing on an item of personal property; it is a mild initiatory ordeal; it makes everyone in the theater alike in at least one way; it has some metaphorical references to the victims of Auschwitz and My Lai; and because the performers wear the shoes while depicting the Sharon Tate murders, there is the suggestion of audience involvement—group responsibility—in that act. Removing one's shoes is a way of accepting hospitality; in Asia guests always leave their shoes at the door.

The most difficult, paradigmatic, and unsettling scene of

audience participation in *Commune* is the My Lai sequence. Up till now the Group has tried four solutions to this scene, none of them definitive. The action of the scene is a re-presentation of an interview relating the killing of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai by American troops. The data was taken from newspaper and television reports. The one constant throughout all the versions is the stationing of the three performers taking part in the interview in a triangular relationship to each other overlooking whoever or whatever represents the people of My Lai assembled between, among, or below them.



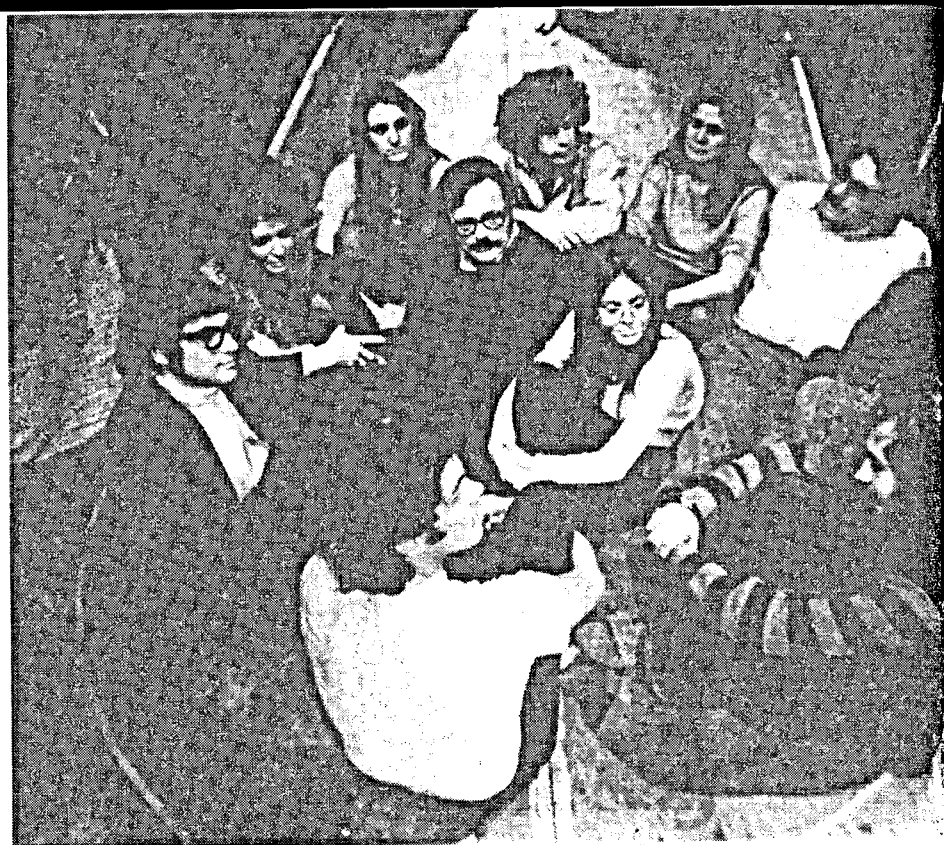
There is little physical action in the scene until the very end when Spalding asks, "How do you shoot babies?" and David answers, "I don't know. It's just one of them things. It seemed like it was the natural thing to do at the time." Then Fearless begins a song-and-dance which the other two men join.

The little pigs they roast themselves
And trot about this lovely land
With knives and forks stuck in their backs
Inquiring if you'd like some ham.¹

Throughout the scene Lizzie, blindfolded, is finding her way through the environment by locating road signs reading "El Dorado."

The first solution is to have the audience represent the villagers

¹ This is a verse from a popular nineteenth-century song of American utopia, *Oleana!* The well-known chorus of the song is sung early in *Commune*.



Photograph 12. Eleven spectators in the Circle during the My Lai scene of *Commune*. They are waiting to see if four other spectators will join them or if the play will stop. (Frederick Eberstadt)

at My Lai. Fearless herds spectators into the circle. He plays cowhand and kicks spectators with his feet and shouts, "Get a move on, move along now!" until he gets about fifteen people inside the ten-foot-diameter circle. The interview is played as soon as the audience is settled. They are not told why they are brought into the circle or what to do after the scene is over. Some people stay in the circle until the end of the play; some

sheepishly slink back to their places. Many people are confused about what is expected of them. Clearly this first solution is obscure and manipulative. Sometimes people play "doggie" games with Fearless; often they giggle.

The second solution is that Fearless selects fifteen persons at random from the audience and says to them, "I want you fifteen people to come into the center of this circle to represent the villagers at My Lai." Usually the fifteen persons come in. But sometimes there are holdouts. Then James Griffiths (Fearless) takes off his shirt and says: "I am taking off my shirt to signify that the performance is now stopped. You people have the following choices. First, you can come into the circle, and the performance will continue; second, you can go to anyone else in the room and ask them to take your place, and, if they do, the performance will continue; third, you can stay where you are, and the performance will remain stopped; or fourth, you can go home, and the performance will continue in your absence."

Whenever Griffiths recites these conditions, there is a shock wave in the theater. The "real world" penetrates the "theater world" interrupting a performance. As Griffiths speaks, the other performers relax, go to the toilet or take water, sit down, talk. Soon the audience understands that the play really has stopped. Usually the break is brief because in the face of an interrupted performance pressure builds fast for resumption, and the recalcitrant spectators either come into the circle or select substitutes. But for the duration of the break one point is made absolutely clear: What is at stake is not the themes of the play—not the people of My Lai—but the immediate question of whether or not the show will go on. The longer the break, the more urgently this question asserts itself.

On Sunday, February 28, 1971, the break lasted more than three hours. Two days later I wrote out my impressions in my notebook. I think it is worth quoting that entry at length.

From My Notebook

The performance went along splendidly. There was an audience of about forty, including two small student groups—eight from the Columbia Players' Club and about five from an English class at Long Island University. The march to Death Valley showed that the audience was warm to us. Upstairs, before sending them into the theater, I made the following announcement: "There is some participation. If you want to be left alone, sit up high."

When My Lai came, Fearless selected his fifteen people. It was almost a random choice. He passed over Loren from Norman Taffel's theater next door (*Little Trips*), because last time she was at *Commune* she was disruptive. He included three very straight looking fortyish people sitting protectively deep back on the carpeted overhang above Freedom Circle. One of them not only took his shoes with him to his place, but stuffed them into the pockets of his overcoat for double safekeeping. The other man had a funny, short nose and something wrong with his teeth. He kept quiet most of the time. The lady was tough, but not in an attractive way. She was hard, up-tight, dressed all in black, a middle-aged social-worker type.

Four persons refused to come into the My Lai circle—the three on the overhang and a Frenchman named Jean. At first I thought that the three on the overhang were French, too, and didn't understand what was happening. The waiting began. As usual, there was some consternation as people became aware that the performance was stopped. Were we serious? Was the play really stopped? The toilets were in use. People strolled and explored. One spectator later told me that it was "the first *real* intermission I ever took part in." Conversations began; people looked at each other and at the theater. The Three settled back deeper. Jean smiled and said in a nicely French way, "Yes, yes, I understand. Oh, no, I won't go in." The people in the circle, mostly students from Columbia, were giggly. They taunted those who wouldn't go in.

Soon some spectators began to chant, "We want the show, we want the show!" The actors held their places pretty well, though Bruce and Lizzie went into the alcove where the lighting board was. Then T. W. [former general manager of the Group] began a tirade. In a very loud and sneering voice he attacked Griffiths and the Three. He accused Griffiths of not choosing people randomly but in order to stop the performance. He called the Three up-tight, unhip, old, not tuned in; he disparaged them for dressing in ties and jackets. T. W. got louder and more abusive; he was angry, giggling, and breathing hard. Still talking, he put on his coat, grabbed his date by her wrist, and stalked out of the theater, shoes in hand.

It was about 9:45—the show had stopped at about 9:15. People went over to talk to the Three, who were very angry: "We came here to see a play! We were told we didn't have to participate! We do not want to participate! Get on with the play!" Then they said they were enjoying the play until the interruption.

Then they asked if they could have their money back. Someone told them they could pick substitutes to go into the circle. "That would be participating! We were told upstairs we would not be forced to participate!"

The man with the small nose motioned me to him. He whispered, "Get on with the show!" These people were afraid and angry. But as time went on, some of their anger drained, and they grew to enjoy the attention heaped on them; they hoarded those gratifications. It seemed that for the first time in a long while they were the center of attention in a matter concerning their ability to make a decision. They were not in the spotlight because of some sudden accident or disease. There were no lawyers or doctors to serve as intermediaries. They were in control—able to keep the play stopped or to license its resumption.

At one point the man with the pipe and the lady—probably man and wife—threatened to sue the theater for "forced participation." But they soon withdrew their threat, assuring me that they would not give the Group the "satisfaction of so much publicity." They were convinced that they were picked for the circle because Fearless knew they were people of substance who would seek redress in the law. But they were not going to fall into the trap.

About ten people gathered around the Three, and the mood got warmer. The woman in black said she'd already raised her share of adolescents and didn't choose to go through the process a second time with us. The man with the pipe kept insisting he wanted to see the play. "It's very good, and I want to know how it ends." He draped his arm around my shoulder and confided, "Now tell them to start again, will you?" He didn't believe the matter was out of my hands. People came and left the overhang as if it were a place where critical negotiations were going on. After Griffiths left the overhang, the man with the pipe told me that they had "discussed the issues meaningfully." He offered to let anyone in the room volunteer to take his place in the circle, but he would not select people. The lady in black wouldn't even let anyone take her place. It was 11 P.M.

Meanwhile, throughout the theater, among performers and audience alike, new situations developed. The small audience got to know not only each other but the performers, too. Names were exchanged. Wine and cheese were suggested, but it was Sunday and stores were closed. The coffeepot was put to use. One performer asked if she could go home. I said I was not in charge. Several people talked with Jean, who assured them that no

matter what the Three did, he wouldn't go into the circle. A performer put on his coat and said: "Rich, there ain't gonna be any more play tonight." Another performer was anxious because several of her friends had come to the play that night, and left.

Finally it was decided that performers could go home if they picked spectators to take their roles. The logic was that if the performance had stopped, then it had stopped for performers as well as audience. Shortly thereafter Patricia Bower left, picking Wendy, Jean's wife, to play Lizzie. So here was a locked situation: Jean would not go into the circle, and Wendy—who wanted to play Lizzie—would not go home. A little while later, Jayme Daniel, playing Jayson, left after picking Nancy Walter [one of the writers of the Firehouse Theater] as his replacement. No one knew how Wendy and Nancy would play their roles if the play resumed.

After the performers playing Lizzie and Jayson left, a crisis was confronted: *the crisis of the absolutely prepared performance*. Everyone knew that when/if the play resumed, it would not rest on the same aesthetic basis as before.

Steadily people left the theater. By around 11:30 there were only twenty-five people there. Griffiths proposed a vote. "Here are the alternatives. We go home or we continue as we are." The vote was overwhelmingly to continue. The man with the pipe proposed a vote on continuing the play without getting the holdouts to participate. About seven people voted for this, five abstained. The rest—except Spalding who voted for both sides—voted to continue as we were: to play out the new scenario wherever it might lead, however long it took. Someone asked Spalding how come he voted twice. He answered, "I voted twice, but not for the same candidate."

The vote broke the back of the Three's resistance. They were visibly upset by the outcome of the "democratic process." I don't remember precisely when—I think before the voting—the group from Columbia staged an improvisation. It was not clear what it was about. It began with seven of them lying on their stomachs in the center of the My Lai circle. Then they roamed the space, whispering and shouting, and finally they surrounded a girl and pulled at her clothing. It ended sheepishly, subsiding back into the room.

I began singing. We sang "America the Beautiful" and, for Jean, "La Marseillaise." The performers threw the I Ching and got Hexagram 7, *The Army*: "The army needs perseverance and a strong man. Good fortune without blame." The hexagram was

interpreted as putting full faith in Griffiths/Fearless. I was told not to interfere in any way. The singing continued, and when we began "Do, a deer, a female deer" from *The Sound of Music*, everyone in the theater picked it up and aimed it at the Three. It was too much; they picked up their coats and moved toward the door. A feeling of excitement and triumph shot through me. Even the Three seemed happy. Not just about leaving (at last!) but also because something had happened, somehow the night hadn't been wasted. As they got to the door, I embraced the lady in black. She responded. They left.

The room was unified, and only Jean stood between everyone and a resumed performance. He said he wouldn't go into the circle because he didn't know what going in meant. I explained to him: "You are asked to represent the villagers who were killed randomly at My Lai." Suddenly Jean said, "Okay, I go in." It was 12:15.

I volunteered to read Lizzie's and Jayson's lines, and Wendy and Nancy would repeat the lines after me giving them any expression they felt appropriate. We began. The room was very quiet. There were nineteen spectators, including me and Elizabeth Le Compte, the play's codirector, and nine performers, including the two from the audience.

The performance was *without aesthetics*. There were no questions of good or bad; all did as well as they could; naturally the performers worked more skillfully than the newcomers. But this skill was not overbearing—it didn't shut out the feelings of Wendy and Nancy. The skills of the Group were no more in question than eye color. The play was ritualized and demeticized. *The performance itself was what was important*. The audience remained not to find out what happened in the play but to witness the play completing itself. The play, of course, had its references to events outside the room, but essentially the performance was an event inside the room. The event that had been in question for more than three hours was now completing itself. Everyone was collaborating in that, just as everyone had collaborated in the interruption.

The next day Spalding Gray told me that the lights seemed brighter to him when the play resumed. At first he attributed it to his exhaustion. But then he thought it was because so many barriers had come down. There were fewer things between him and the audience. They saw him *as he was*—not as a magician-performer, but as a person *out of whom* the performance arose, just as the Commarque Horse arises out of the stone of its cave.

Seeing him thus—as the performer and not as the role the performer was playing—when he resumed the actions of his role, there was no need to pretend that those actions took place anywhere else than in this theater at this time.

When Wendy speaking Lizzie's lines confessed crimes, I had the sense of *objective crimes* needing to be listed, finding their reality in the telling. The play ended with the usual dialogue between Clementine and Spalding:

What would you describe as the role of the artist in today's society?

The role of the artist?

Yes.

Yes, yes, of course.

Slowly the theater emptied. People stuck around as we pumped out the tub. Water = blood = water. I was giddy. Steve and I had an overwhelming desire for milk shakes—breasts, come—and we bought milk, ice cream, chocolate syrup, and mixed some rich stuff at my apartment.

Analysis

Most of what I feel about the long interruption of February 28 I got down in my notebook entry a few days later. But I wish to emphasize a few points. *Commune* that night had three parts, only one of them dramatic in the orthodox sense. The first, until the stoppage, was "just a play." The second—from the stoppage until the Three left the theater and Jean agreed to go into the circle—was the struggle of a community-in-information against those who prevented this community from organizing itself. However, the struggle itself was what made solidarity inevitable. The Three were as necessary to the building of a community as an antagonist is to traditional drama. The building of the community had two parts: first, breaking down barriers so that the majority could act together against the Three. This part culminated in the votes. Secondly, the increasing pressure against the Three so that their leaving was actually a moment of supreme triumph.

The third part of the night began when Jean entered the circle and the play resumed. Doing the play was a confirmation of the power of those who expelled the Three and a demonstration of the community's ability to carry out a positive program. Doing the play was an authentic celebration. This celebration couldn't have happened—indeed it never occurred before or since—without

the long stoppage and struggle. The solidarity between the audience and the performers (even those who left knowing that they were not betraying the others) did away with *Commune-as-play* and replaced it with *Commune-as-ritual*.

I do not want to overvalue the experience of February 28. It reached such extraordinary levels because it was unrehearsable. Were the Group to repeat such events with regularity, I am sure they would be drained of meaning. Also the community that was formed in the Garage that night didn't last. A few weeks later the Group went to Wendy's for a party; but most of the people present at the Garage on February 28 never saw each other again (the exceptions being the student groups who were together for reasons other than TPG). Also I am not at all convinced that nights like February 28 can take place with a large audience, say more than seventy-five people. But insofar as the long stoppage was what it was, it was a model of participation in which individuals were free to use their own judgments in a generally nonmanipulative situation.

The third solution. On April 24, 1971—the day of a mass demonstration in Washington against the Vietnam War—the Group decided to donate the night's box office to the antiwar movement. As part of the benefit performance members wanted somehow to involve the entire audience in the My Lai scene. Also the random selection of fifteen persons was wearing the performers down; some people detested the unpredictable interruption of the play, the inability to know whether or not the prepared rhythms would complete themselves as rehearsed.

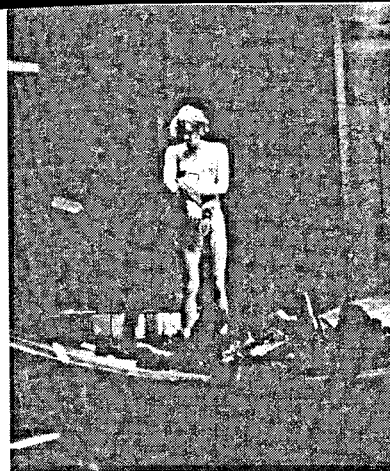
It was decided that Spalding would say, "I want everyone in the theater to come down to the center here to represent the villagers at My Lai." There was a moment's hesitation, and then a few people began moving. Soon just about everyone in the theater was on the move. The floor was covered with people. The performers took positions high in the ramparts. When the scene was over, Lizzie shouted, "You're all disgusting." (It's never clear exactly to whom she is saying this, performers-as-soldiers, spectators-as-citizens, performers-as-members-of-the-commune, spectators-as-My-Lai-villagers.) Spalding then says, "The scene is over. You can go back to where you were, or maybe you'd like to find another place in the environment from which you can watch the play. And we'd like a few people to stay in the center circle." Again there was general movement.

Then the play resumed—not from where it leaves off but back a few beats. Spalding, David, and Fearless take their places

on the Wave (as in the first two solutions to the My Lai scene) and do the "Little Pigs" song-and-dance. This time Lizzie's line is unambiguously directed at the men. Except for the ten or so people who remain in the circle the rest of the audience sees the My Lai scene from two perspectives: under the gun and outside the action; they are able to apprise the action from two opposing points of view, that of the victim and that of the soldier.

The fourth solution. In December, 1971, the Group began doing the My Lai scene without any direct participation of the audience at all. As people enter the theater, they deposit their shoes on a large cloth laid out like a blanket. At the start of the My Lai scene Fearless and Clementine drag the sack up the Wave and dump it in the circle. Spalding, David, and Fearless take their places on the Wave and play the scene across the footwear of the audience. People sometimes react strongly to seeing their shoes. Gasps, giggles, pointing. Just about everyone connects the image to the concentration camps, and the scene's meaning is clear. Occasionally, someone retrieves his/her shoes at once.

Each of the solutions to the My Lai scene is an attempt to find non-manipulative participatory actions. Herding the audience is manipulative because people didn't know what was expected of them. But even the second solution is manipulative because it casts the audience as "villagers" and forces them into playing roles they may not be prepared to play. It only becomes non-manipulative when someone refuses to enter and the play stops. Then performers and spectators have the chance to meet on equal terms. But the second solution was not dropped because it was manipulative. It was dropped because the performers didn't enjoy the uncertainty introduced nightly into the play. The performance became aimed at the moment Jim/Fearless selected the fifteen. The question was: Would we get *through it*, or would the play be *disrupted*? It is hard to keep prepared rhythms when threatened by the chance that the play might not be completed. And when the play is stopped, the focus shifts from the performance to the entire theatrical event, from the performers to the spectators. This is where participation hurts. Performers are trained to perform, they resist events that disrupt prepared rhythms. It is not easy to balance the need for "scored roles" with the uncertainties of participation. Performers, like anyone else, do not like to appear clumsy, off-balance, or ineffectual. Once someone refuses to come into the Circle, the illusion of theatrical inevitability is shattered, and with it goes the



Photograph 13. The third solution to the My Lai scene: Bruce dries himself near the end of *Commune*, standing amid the spectators' shoes. (Frederick Eberstadt)



Photographs 14, 15, and 16. Some subtle participations in *Commune* by spectators. In Photos 14 and 15 Spalding gestures during the Shoot Out. He is straddling the shoulders of a spectator who points his own gun and shoots twice, once while Spalding is there and once as Spalding leaves. In Photo 16 a young woman reaches out to comfort Clementine who has just experienced orgasm, exhaustion, and death during the Father Jesus gang-bang scene. (Frederick Eberstadt)



performer's magic powers. However satisfactory this may be from a director's point of view, it is dismaying and sometimes humiliating to the performers.

The third solution is all-inclusive and generally non-manipulative. Most of the time a few people don't come to the center of the floor, but this does not detract from the overall effect of the scene. The stay-behinds are somewhat like combat photographers or professional witnesses. They usually huddle back out of sight. For the rest of the audience the trip to the floor enables them to change perspective, meet their neighbors, and be included in the drama. Although the third solution interrupts the play, the interruption is known in advance, and it lasts a regular thirty seconds to a minute. Therefore it doesn't destroy the performers' scores—in fact, it can be made part of their scores. My objection to the third solution is that it is innocuous. It is too easy, makes no real point, and waters down the My Lai scene.

The fourth solution is not participatory. It uses the audience's shoes as props. It is extremely effective theatrically.

The riskiest participation is the second solution, the one that resulted in the long stoppage of February 28. This is the solution that most interests me because it permits the spectators to enter the performance on their own terms—or to leave it altogether. It wasn't very exciting when the fifteen people immediately came into the Circle, sheepishly accepting whatever roles they were asked to play. But with the slightest resistance or hesitation a shock of recognition, surprise, power, and possibilities runs through the theater. The performance itself is in doubt, open to revision, questionable, human, here and now. The performers are seen as people playing roles, telling a story and not just as characters. Theatrical structure is revealed starkly, and choices are out in the open.

Reviewing the history of the My Lai scene there appears to be a kind of entropy operating. Participation is risky, both for the spectators and for the performers. In a way as director I have the easiest position. I am not manipulated as the audience might be; and I am not out front risking my well-prepared score as the performers are. I monitor the experiments and tell the performers during the next night's notes what I saw. Over the long run what I have seen is that participation decreases as a play runs—this is true of *Dionysus* as well as of *Commune*. I think the participation decreases because scores are built, either consciously or unconsciously, and disruptions become increasingly annoying and finally intolerable. Also because there is a scant

tradition of participation the audience also feels more comfortable when left alone. I think both the problem of scoring and of building a tradition of participation are solvable. But in doing so the means of participation will change.

In *The Tooth of Crime* TPG is for the first time mainly telling a story and playing characters in order to tell a story. But we do not want the production to be fundamentally mimetic or illusionistic. Among the things we are doing are certain new kinds of participation. First off, we consider the Garage as the TPG's home. Instead of hiring a box-office person and a technical crew, the performers (and me) are doing that work. So that when a spectator comes to buy a ticket before the play, he deals with a performer or the director. On the walls of the lobby upstairs over the theater are pictures of the performers—displayed in a style like that of Broadway. (*The Tooth of Crime* is all about image-makers, stars, and performing styles.) But underneath the pictures are the performers themselves, doing jobs. When the audience enters the theater, some performers are cleaning up the space, others are arranging the props, checking the lights and the environment. If a performer sees someone he/she knows, there are greetings, maybe a discussion. The performance begins where it actually is rooted: in the ongoing lives of the performers and spectators. As curtain time nears, the performers will begin to put on their costumes, make final preparations, actually "get into character." Again during intermission the performers divest themselves of their roles and relate to the audience on a person-to-person basis. And again after the play is over, instead of vanishing with the audience's applause, the performers begin to put on their costumes, making final preparation for the night. Within *The Tooth of Crime* as well as around it are participatory moments, but of a different kind than we have tried before. There is much direct address to spectators, soliloquies, and movement of the audience around the space. More than ever each spectator chooses how he is to place himself in relation to the action. The environment allows everyone three clear choices and many gradations. A spectator can stand, sit, or walk on a gallery eleven feet above the floor surrounding half the space, or he/she can sit, stand, or walk around the floor and surround each scene as it occurs as if it were being played in the street, or the spectator can sit or stand on the large house-like construction of platforms, towers, and bridges that fills the center of the theater to a height of sixteen feet. There is no way to stay in one place and see everything.

The more I examine the questions that audience participation raises, the more I see that these penetrate to the heart of the audience-performer relationship. What does the performer "owe" to the spectator, and vice-versa? If a spectator "finds out" that a character is not "real," does this diminish his enjoyment of the play? How does this knowledge change his experience of the play? To what degree is the performer a story-teller and not a story-actor? How deeply do performers need spectators to support the illusion of character and situation? Can this support suddenly be removed, a new situation created, and then transformed back into the support? Why does a performer feel threatened when a spectator "moves into" the performance space? Why does a spectator feel threatened when directly addressed by a performer? What is clear is that the relationship between the performers and the spectators needs to be straightened out by being painstakingly scrutinized—examined not in theoretical discussions but by means of many, many experiments in participation. On both sides are great reservoirs of doubt and distrust. There are many causes for this, but not the least are the conventions of the orthodox theater that separate audience from performers and which make the performers into sellers of pleasure-services, depriving them of self-respect. Although much has been said about spectators feeling manipulated by performers, as much can be said on the other side. Performers are used by producers, directors, and writers. And by audiences who want only to get off on the show.

Participation is a way of trying to humanize relationships between performers and spectators. This process far transcends what goes on in a theater. But there is no better laboratory for trying out ways of responsivity than in the intense, microcosmic space of a theater. If my recent experiments in audience participation seem hesitant, even timid, it is because I recognize the size and depth of the problems revealed by participation. Each big jump is followed by exploratory probes in various directions. Each apparent halting is only temporary. There is no technique more important to the development of contemporary theater than participation.

Some TPG experiments in participation have come from ideas first tried out by John Cage and later by Allan Kaprow. The impact of new music and Happenings on participatory theater cannot be overestimated. It was from the direction of music and painting that theater was revolutionized, and no one has had more

effect than Cage and Kaprow.² In 1966 Kaprow published an essay on the theory of Happenings. In it he lays down the following seven axioms:

(A) *The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct, as possible. . . .* Something will always happen at this juncture, which, if it is not revelatory, will not be merely bad art—for no one can easily compare it with this or that accepted masterpiece.

(B) *Therefore, the source of themes, materials, actions, and the relationships between them are to be derived from any place or period except from the arts, their derivatives, and their milieu. . . .* Freedom to accept all kinds of subject matter will probably be possible in the Happenings of the future, but I think not for now.

(C) *The performance of a Happening should take place over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing locales.*

(D) *Time, which follows closely on space considerations, should be variable and discontinuous. . . .* Above all this is "real" or "experienced" time as distinct from conceptual time. . . . Real time is always connected with doing something, with an event of some kind, and so is bound with things and spaces.

(E) *Happenings should be performed once only. . . .* There is a special instance of where more than one performance is entirely justified. This is the score or scenario which is designed to make every performance significantly different from the previous one.

(F) *It follows that audiences should be eliminated entirely. All the elements—people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time—can in this way be integrated.*

(G) *The composition of a Happening proceeds exactly as in Assemblage and Environments, that is, it is evolved as a collage of events in certain spans of time and in certain spaces.*³

² A bibliography of Cage's and Kaprow's writing is no substitute for an experience of their work in performance. And the relationship between them is more than coincidence: Kaprow was a member of a class taught by Cage during the 1950's at the New School. See Cage's *Silence* (1961), *A Year from Monday* (1967), and *Notations* (1969). And Kaprow's *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings* (1966), *Some Recent Happenings* (1966b), *Untitled Essay and Other Works* (1967), and *Days Off* (1970). Also Michael Kirby's *Happenings* (1965) and the TDR special issue on Happenings, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1965).

³ All Kaprow quotations from *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings* (1966), 188 ff.

Kaprow's view of participation is sophisticated and humane—more humane than mine has been on some occasions.

To assemble people unprepared for an event and say that they are "participating" if apples are thrown at them or if they are herded about is to ask very little of the whole notion of participation. . . . I think it is a mark of mutual respect that all persons involved in a Happening be willing and committed participants who have a clear idea of what they are to do. This is simply accomplished by writing out the scenario or score for all and discussing it thoroughly with them beforehand. In this respect it is not different from the preparations for a parade, a football match, a wedding, or a religious service. It is not even different from a play. The one big difference is that while knowledge of the scheme is necessary, professional talent is not; the situations in a Happening are lifelike or, if they are unusual, are so rudimentary that professionalism is actually uncalled for. . . . The best participants have been persons not normally engaged in art or performance, but who are moved to take part in an activity that is at once meaningful to them in its ideas yet natural in its methods.

I have directed two participatory pieces somewhat according to Kaprow's model. One, *Clothes*, is discussed in Chapter 3. The other, *Government Anarchy*, was invented on invitation from Ted Becker of the American Civil Liberties Union who commissioned TPG in May, 1970, to do a participatory event for an ACLU meeting at the Electric Circus in Manhattan. The scenario for *Government Anarchy* collected political ideas that were in the air and focused them through a set of questions I took from Ralph Ortiz's event *The Sky Is Falling*, "a destruction ritual" written in 1969 and which I saw in Philadelphia in early 1970. The *Government Anarchy* scenario:

Each A.C.L.U. member or guest was stopped at a desk at the front door of the Electric Circus. I sat at the desk, and behind me with an accordion file was Paul Epstein. I asked the name of each person and repeated it very loud to Epstein who pretended to look for a dossier of the named person. To each name Epstein replies with a color code: "Red," "Green," "White," or "Gray." His designations are random. One out of every nine or ten people is designated Gray. Gray is asked to step to one side and wait. All the others are let through. Upstairs there is a show staged by various other theater groups.

(I intentionally asked Ted Becker who commissioned TPG's part in the overall event not to tell me anything about the show upstairs.)

Gray is assured of his or her safety and then taken to a side room and put behind police barriers inside an empty, badly lit room. Several performers stand guard, refusing to answer any questions. As Grays are collected, some are blindfolded and led from the room to interrogation rooms upstairs. Other Grays are simply made to wait in the holding room. After about three hours they are released. The blindfolded Grays are led upstairs one at a time. The process of moving Grays from the holding room to the interrogation rooms begins about one half hour after the first person is stopped at the front door.

Interrogation rooms are on the third floor of the Circus. One is a storeroom, the other a toilet. In each there is a table, two chairs, a tape recorder and operator, a photographer, an interrogator. As soon as Gray is brought in he is photographed (by Polaroid process), and the tape is turned on. He is asked to sit, and then he is unblindfolded. Gray is asked a long series of questions (standardized) about his personal life, family, political affiliations, connection to the A.C.L.U., reading habits. Some questions are abusive and sexual. After each of these, Gray is asked to take off some of his/her clothes, and his photo is taken.

The interrogation takes about thirty minutes. If Gray refuses to answer a question, the interrogator repeats it. Like a broken record the question is repeated again and again until Gray answers or the time allotted for the interrogation is exhausted. After the questioning, Gray is politely thanked for his "cooperation," handed his clothes, and shown out of the room. Often Gray did not know where he was or how to get back to his friends. Some people remained lost for fifteen minutes or more.

The tapes and photos of Gray are delivered to the main floor of the Circus where in an alcove off the large ballroom the tapes are played over a speaker system and the photos projected on the wall by means of an opaque projector.

When the last person is processed at the front door—about two hours after we began, a long line formed outside the Circus—Epstein and I are free to go. When the last Gray is released after interrogation, about three hours after starting, the remaining Grays in the holding room are released, and the performers playing interrogators and guards are free. Those showing photos and playing tapes continue their tasks until the entire program is over—about three and a half hours after the start.

Government Anarchy is participation by means of manipulation—manipulation raised to an extreme and cruel intensity. The audience is used as material; they are processed. This, of course, is a main part of the point we were trying to make: how the “legal system” uses people as material for its own perpetuation, not in order to “do justice,” and how this system is maintained largely by the active, willing collaboration of those who are being processed. *Government Anarchy* is many “plays”—different for each participant. To those who enter without being detained, the play is just another waiting in line; to those who are detained but not interrogated, it is a bother, perhaps infuriating because they miss what’s going on upstairs; to those who are interrogated, the play may be amusing, stupid, frightening. It was all of this, and more, to some of the Grays. One rule TPG followed was that no one was detained by force. If a Gray simply got up and left, either the holding room or the interrogation, he was not stopped—he was just *told* he could not go, that he *must* sit down. Grays collaborated because they thought it was all a game or because they were intimidated.

The play is what happens to each participator and performer, and what happens to them all collectively, but no one, not even members of TPG, can see everything. *Government Anarchy* extends over time and spaces and is much like what Kaprow envisions (in structure, not effect). The politics of *Anarchy* is clear—we put some A.C.L.U. people through what the A.C.L.U. is supposed to prevent—but with enough distance and lack of fear (everyone knew *Anarchy* was “just a play”) to get a handle on the experience. Those who were not Grays would hear about the play from the Grays. Other pieces have been built the same way—Megan Terry’s *Changes* at La Mama in 1968, for example. In this kind of participation audiences do not take part in a play—moving in and out of the drama. Instead the audience is the stuff from which the drama is made. The structure of *Anarchy* is close to that of an initiation ordeal/ritual. After the play is over, some people in the audience (Grays) are “different” from the others by virtue of having undergone an experience. From the perspective of a visiting anthropologist, *Government Anarchy* is a kind of ritual that induces separations. From inside the experience, each Gray had a different, somewhat fragmentary hold on the play. I feel uncomfortable calling *Anarchy* a “play.” But when things got rough, more than one Gray protested, “Hey, this is only a play, remember?”

At that moment the performer bears down, trying his best to

convince Gray and himself that *Anarchy* isn’t a play at all—if play means make-believe following a set script. One Gray was so rattled that he asked a friend outside the holding room to call the police. When two cops arrived, I told them that the Circus was private property and that TPG was hired to screen out “undesirables.” I reminded the police that the neighborhood was unsavory. “If the gentleman objects,” I said, “he is free to get out and stay out.” Gray decided to stay, and the perplexed cops left. Now, what can one say of a scene like that? Where is the dividing line between make-believe and “reality”? The mixture of “game” and “reality” is difficult to analyze. Some of the fabric of expectations and obligations binding performers to spectators is ripped apart, but some remains. A basic agreement remains intact: No physical force is used, and even Gray knows somewhere that TPG are actors. One of the points of *Anarchy* is that in “real life” people collaborate with their oppressors not from fear but from the belief that the authorities will “play by the rules” and that these rules are based on “fair play.” Cruelly, and too late, victims discover that the rules are bent to favor the powerful; if fair play means one set of rules for all, then it does not exist—except perhaps in the theater.

Anarchy attempts to teach these lessons—not by precept, but through experience. Anytime Gray removes himself from the performance, the performance is over for him. Some people left the holding room; a few would not answer questions. I felt that these learned as much as those who stayed to the bitter end, cooperating in every abuse.

A Brief Look at My Early Experiences in Participation

Moving South when I was drafted in 1958 was the most important single event in my artistic life. I was born in Newark, New Jersey, and lived there in the Jewish middle-class ghetto called Weequahic until I was fourteen. I was very close to my mother’s father; we lived in his house, which was spacious. When he died a few weeks after my bar mitzvah, something definitely ended for me. Later my parents sold the big house, and we moved to South Orange where I went to high school. Then I went away to Cornell for college. None of these living places prepared me for rural Louisiana, and, later, New Orleans.

I lived in New Orleans from 1960 until 1967. There life goes on in the streets—especially the streets of the French Quarter where I lived. I took part in the street life from time to time,

but I spent a great number of hours on my second-floor balcony watching the streets. Also I became part of the freedom movement and the antiwar movement, both of which took place in the streets in sit-ins, sit-downs, marches, demonstrations. I learned about dramas made by people in order to communicate a point of view, a feeling. I learned about exemplary actions.

My arrival in New Orleans coincided exactly with the school riots of September, 1960. I got involved, and committed to the ethos of participatory democracy. Participatory democracy is clumsy, inefficient, often stupid, and very frustrating to a person who sees the "right way" and wants to "get it done." But participatory democracy is a beautiful method of getting people to relate to each other on the basis of mutual desires, and of learning about power: how to get it, use it, abuse it. Over the years 1960-1963 I fused participatory democracy, New Orleans street life, and my own developing ideas about what theater could be. In 1964 I began an association with the Free Southern Theater that took me into rural Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. I directed *Purlie Victorious* for the FST, I went to some black church services and funerals, I got deeply involved in FST affairs.⁴

The FST became, step by step, an all-black company, and my involvement declined. But what I had learned I kept. Along with Paul Epstein and Franklin Adams I founded the New Orleans Group in 1965. This work had roots in painting, music, Happenings. My contract with the Tulane Theater Department prevented me from directing plays there, so I worked outside the academic structure. While preparing the TDR special issue on Happenings I met John Cage in the summer of 1965. That four-hour meeting was very important because Cage focused for me much of what I was feeling but couldn't express. Cage spoke about his 1952 Black Mountain College concert.

The structure we should think about is that of each person in the audience. In other words, his consciousness is structuring the experience differently from anybody else's in the audience. So the less we structure the theatrical occasion and the more it is unstructured daily life, the greater will be the stimulus to the structuring faculty of each person in the audience. If we have done nothing he then will have everything to do.⁵

⁴ See *The Free Southern Theater* by *The Free Southern Theater*, ed. by Thomas C. Dent, Gilbert Moses, and Richard Schechner (1969).

⁵ Kirby and Schechner (1965), 55.

After I left Cage, I chewed over what he had said. I sat on my balcony and looked at the busyness of the streets with new eyes. Was what was going on at the intersection of Toulouse and Dauphine theater? I could accept it theoretically, but it wasn't enough—after all, as a "theater person" I didn't want to "do nothing." Kaprow's applications and transformations of Cage's ideas were closer to my needs. Under the impact of these ideas, plus things that were happening in classes at Tulane, NOG prepared 4/66, a Happening-like event shown twice in April, 1966. 4/66 was a mixed salad of games, chance music, performed bits (played by nonactors who were, nevertheless, rehearsed painstakingly), and "rituals"—all staged in an organic arrangement of a large open space. The events were loosely connected in a progression leading to the selection of a hero/victim spectator who was stripped and bathed in a sudsy bath the bottom of which was mud—so that the white, warm, sensuous softness gave way to the gritty, heavy, brown mudness. 4/66 had a scenario that was meticulously drawn by painter Adams on a seven-foot-long scroll. Each event had its allotted time and place; even "free play" had a beginning and end. 4/66 was latticelike in its structure—a form I like even now.

Mostly there was no free play. There were routines for the performers and options for the audience. For example, during one sequence, spectators could watch, play musical instruments, push a large papier-mâché ball across the room, compete in one of several games. Busy and un-Cageian as 4/66 was, it taught me a lot. I worked collaboratively with two other directors. I worked in an open space that was frequently changing shapes to keep up with events. The piece had no plot, but instead was held together by a progression of actual events. Like a game, what went on in 4/66 had no one-to-one relation to life outside the room. No Hedda Gabler being impersonated. Whatever meaning the events had was metaphoric, structural, by analogy; or in the events themselves which were not secondary, not reflections, not mimetic, but actual.

4/66 was staged on the second floor of a large studio—a big open L-shaped space roughly forty feet square with a ceiling sloping from a crest of about twenty feet to about eight feet at the edges. The audience started out sitting on bridge chairs or standing. The chairs were arranged in many different configurations. I remember clearly being proud of setting up an S-shaped row of chairs, and a circle. But by the time 4/66 was a half hour old the chairs were swept aside or totally rearranged.

4/66 was the first time I had ever asked a spectator to do anything in the theater except buy a ticket, sit still, laugh in the middle, and applaud at the end.

NOG decided to try next an "environmental theater" production of a "regular play." I took the term "environmental theater" from Kaprow, who never used it as such but implied it in his writings. We selected Ionesco's *Victims of Duty* as the play—because no matter how "regular" it was, *Victims* was about identity-shifting, fantasies, transformations. It needed only a small cast and seemed to offer great possibilities for invention. We worked on *Victims* for most of an academic year and opened it for a run of twelve performances near the end of May, 1967. (*Victims* was my New Orleans farewell: The day after it closed I was on my way to New York for good. I and five other Tulane theater faculty members resigned after a long, grinding dispute with the administration.) Audience participation was only an incidental part of the NOG *Victims*. The most innovative thing was the use of whole spaces—the entire theater was converted into the Chouberts' living room.⁶

The action was staged so that some scenes overlapped others. Not every spectator could see or hear everything that was happening. In one scene Nicolas d'Eau picks at random a woman in the audience and begins making out with her. He stops as abruptly as he starts—when his cue is heard. There is no reason for him to begin, no reason for him to stop. During the run the actor playing Nicolas took ill, and I substituted for two performances. The participatory bit was fun, and I was surprised to discover how far I could get with a total stranger in a public situation. Maybe each of the women felt that giving in to me/Nicolas was what one should do to help the play along. During another scene the lights are very dim, and Choubert blindly gropes his way through the audience searching for his wife, Madeleine. He touches many spectators and asks them to help him find Madeleine.

Staging *Victims* helped clarify my ideas about environmental theater, but it did not much advance my thinking about audience participation. I felt that participation was a good thing—but I didn't know why, or even how. So it was blindly that I introduced participation into *Dionysus* in 69 when I staged it the next year. People in the Group didn't talk much about participation while

⁶ For descriptions of *Victims* see Schechner (1969a), "Six Axioms for Environmental Theatre."



Photograph 17. The New Orleans Group environment for *Victims of Duty*. Franklin Adams was the environmentalist who worked with me and Paul Epstein on this design. Rojo constructed the spiral of chairs seen at the right. The audience sat everywhere. The view is of the moment before the audience is admitted to the theater. The Chouberts and their friends are seated around the table eating supper—really. (Matt Herron)

planning *Dionysus*. Participation grew to a central place in the production in a very natural way: More and more scenes seemed to need the active collaboration of the audience. In April and May, 1968, about six weeks before the play opened, we began open rehearsals on Saturday afternoons. At one of these we worked on a scene we later called the Caress. The scene is an adaptation of a workshop exercise. Performers go in groups of three or four into the audience and select a spectator at random and begin caressing him/her. The caressing spreads out so that ultimately a number of spectators are caressing each other. The scene parallels Pentheus' visit to Cithaeron to spy on the women making love. Other participatory scenes—such as dancing with *Dionysus*, singing to taunt Pentheus, and marching out of the theater with the performers at the end of the play—were tested during open rehearsals.

I believe participation should generally be in the service of disillusion. It should not be to build an unreal world or a fantasy

projection. I see a function of theater as helping people to *work through* their fantasies. I think that the only way to do this is to raise fantasies to full consciousness—to get them out front. D. W. Winnicott's ideas are very helpful:

The important part of this concept [relating art, religion, and philosophy] is that whereas inner psychic reality has a kind of location in the mind or in the belly or in the head or somewhere within the bounds of the individual's personality, and whereas what is called external reality is located outside these bounds, playing and cultural experience can be given a location if one uses the concept of the potential space between the mother and the baby.⁷

This potential space is neither inside nor outside—it is an evanescent, temporary space *agreed on unconsciously* by all those participating in an event such as a performance. The first example of this kind of event in each individual life is the space between the mother and the baby: the very close relationship that is neither inside nor outside but, in Winnicott's suggestive term, "transitional."

I am here staking a claim for an intermediate state between a baby's inability and his growing ability to recognize and accept reality. I am therefore studying the substance of *illusion*, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion.⁸

Now, if you'll permit me to explain, this illusion (= art) can be enlisted in the service of disillusion (= unmasking). It is a question of whether the illusion is allowed to stand unchallenged as the whole truth of a situation. Brecht understood this exactly. His *V-effekt* was not meant to eliminate "feeling" from theater, but to emphasize the performer's double role, his difficult function in the transitional space of the theater. "This principle—that the actor appears on the stage in a double role, as Laughton and as Galileo; that the showman Laughton does not disappear in the Galileo whom he is showing . . . comes to mean simply that the tangible, matter-of-fact process is no longer hidden behind a veil; that Laughton is actually there, standing on the

⁷ Winnicott (1971), 53.

⁸ Winnicott (1971), 3.

stage and showing us what he imagines Galileo to have been."⁹ The illusion is immediately disillusioned. To understand this process one has to be clear about the difference between "acting out" and "working through." Acting out is repeating obsessive acts in different variations, not understanding why or even what you are doing. Some kinds of acting methods encourage the actor to be a professional actor-outer. Working through is ripping an obsessive act up by its roots, examining it, talking about it, demystifying it. One is not permitted the luxury of "not knowing what I am doing."

Brecht's *V-effekt* is a way of transforming acting out into working through. To work something through you need the help of others. You need the chance to stop, reflect, repeat, see the event with fresh insight—perhaps through the eyes of another—test variations, follow associations. You need the chance to change—to not do today what you did yesterday. The mechanics of theater—practice, emphasis on collective working, use of the director as an outside eye—are ways of working through if they are consciously used as such. Otherwise there is no more powerful mother of illusion than the theater.

Once a fantasy has been worked through, it is no longer acted out. The theater that does the job of disillusioning its workers and audiences is committing itself to perpetual change.

Winnicott locates the space where play takes place—a "transitional space"—as "the potential space between mother and baby." That is, "the place where cultural experience is located." This place is a mirror-place, a situation where all participants give back what they get, not mechanically, but in subtle variations and distortions. Winnicott's ideas have been confirmed by researches such as those of Ray Birdwhistell who demonstrates that "human beings are constantly engaged in adjustments to the presence and activities of other human beings. As sensitive organisms, they utilize their full sensory equipment in this adjustment."¹⁰ The performance space is living—messages are being sent continuously through many channels. These channels do not necessarily operate symphonically. What my face says is not necessarily what my hands say, and what my body motion says is not necessarily what I am saying with words; and so on through the vast range and complexity of human communications.

⁹ Brecht (1964 [1948]), 194. See all of Brecht's "A Short Organum for the Theatre."

¹⁰ Birdwhistell (1970), 48.

In orthodox theater the creative circle is closed. As many channels as possible except for words and the prearranged gestures of the performers are shut off, hidden, truncated, sidetracked, demolished. Although the audience is present at an orthodox theater performance, "presence" is a way of saying "as absent as can possibly be arranged." Feedback is kept to a minimum. As the narrator of *An Actor Prepares* confesses: "I felt that until we learned how to overcome the effect of that black hole we should never go forward in our work." The "black hole" is the audience as seen from the stage of a proscenium theater. Or not seen. It never occurred to Konstantin Stanislavski to transform the black hole into a living space. He devised instead his method of "circles of attention" so that actors could learn how to systematically exclude the audience and the fear that attends knowing that so many anonymous, hidden viewers are hungrily watching.

The orthodox theater is a closed system discouraging feedback. It is closed not only because the audience is excluded from it but also because whatever happens on stage is already known by the actors, and nothing is supposed to change this prearranged "score." If art and play are related to each other, then orthodox theater excludes one of art's most precious elements: getting back from the other player a version of oneself. Now, this is taken care of if one believes that only the other performers are players. And indeed the architecture and ideology of the orthodox theater are designed to propagate this myth. But obviously the spectators are there. Even in the most ingeniously designed proscenium theater there are hints once in a while that something lives in the black hole. And there is a need to relate to these people not on a mechanical basis, but on a person-to-person basis of exchanging sensory data and experience: playing. The organic mirror of biofeedback cannot take place if any of the partners is frozen, stereotyped, or systematically hidden. Play takes place when the players get back versions of themselves from each other player. This exchange is frozen out of the orthodox theater, with bad consequences. Actors are familiar with the effects of a long run—they lose touch with each other, with the performance. Then they resort to tricks to keep the performance fluid, alive. But the best remedy is to open the creative circle to include the audience who is always changing; to transform the closed system of orthodox theater into an open system of environmental theater.

For about a month starting in January, 1971, Friday's performance of *Commune* was followed by discussions. The performers, and Tom Driver, Dan Newman, John Lahr, Andre Gregory, and Dan Isaac, and audiences participated in these talks. The topic narrowed itself to participation and the relationship between audiences and performers. Newman and Driver returned each week to lead the discussions which, more often than not, moved from the theater to a restaurant in Chinatown and went on to early morning. The same questions returned, unanswered; questions that seem impossible because they make necessary the restructuring of the entire society.

1. How can we get *villagelike* responses from urban Western audiences?
2. How can there be solidarity in the theater when there is none in the streets?
3. Isn't the animosity between performers and spectators a function of the general reification of human relationships in modern, urban society?
4. How can the theater serve as a model, an example?
5. Ought spectators to play roles?
6. What is manipulation? Can it be avoided? Should it?
7. What is the relationship between *moving the body*, participation, and "moving an audience"?
8. Why does the performer fear the spectator? Why does the spectator fear the performer?
9. Why do we think stopping the performance in order to allow/incorporate participation is a disruption? Can it not be an integral part of the event?

From these discussions some practicals came: the My Lai second solution; the direct inclusion of the audience in the revival-meeting scene; the development of the march to Death Valley as a dance that needed the audience in order to complete the circle. Some participatory elements were dropped, others tried and dropped: picking someone from the audience and "killing" them during the murder scene; throwing and reading the I Ching with someone in the audience.

Commune became to a degree an ongoing experiment in audience-performer interaction. Newman devised a class at Livingston College in which the assignment was to come to the Garage on Friday afternoons to be the audience during workshop and then to stay on for Friday evening's performance and discussion. The Group made no formal plans for the class but

let them watch rehearsals and talked with them about the various techniques of participation. It was the Livingstons who made me fully aware of the manipulation problem. They told the Group that the second My Lai solution troubled them because once they came into the center, they didn't know what was expected of them. The Livingstons suggested that if breaks in the performance took place, they should not be part of the thematics of the performance but real-time breaks; this way spectators would not spend time figuring out the style of their movements. We never did more than rehearse these breaks-and-now-you-move. The Livingstons told us that being told to move during the breaks was too much like grade school.

But the idea of breaks in the performance eventually became part of the performance. The Freedom Circle included an exchange of names between performers (who gave either their play or their actual names) and spectators. This sometimes branched out into the whole room until almost everyone was involved in an "active intermission." Often food was found and shared. When the performers wanted to start the play again, they said so. It resumed with Clementine's line, "I went to the ranch, it was a loving scene." The intermission was an analogy to Clementine's memories of her first day at the ranch. The second break ended the third solution to the My Lai scene.

All these experiments were Band-Aids on gaping gut wounds. The wounds were the real fears and hostility performers had for audiences and audiences had for performers. The performers felt that, given a choice, audiences wouldn't want the play to resume. The Livingstons, as audience, felt that the performers were manipulating them, showing them up. Driver felt that the fears and hostility were related to deep insecurities in each performer regarding his body, his abilities, and his worth. Driver didn't think that these were special problems of TPG but something generally true.

To search out these fears, to exorcise them if possible, I invited Driver to run a workshop on Friday, April 30. That afternoon there were six Livingstons at the Garage. Both the performers and the students felt the other side capable of manipulation and tyrannical control. One performer spoke of his fantasy that one night a spectator would come to the theater with a gun, and use it. Another feared the "deadness" of the audience: "No matter what I do, they will not respond."

Driver began the workshop by sending the Livingstons to high perches. He treated them brusquely. "Get out of the way and stay

there." He then asked the performers to lie on the floor on their backs with their heads together, like a wheel with six heads at the hub. He asked them to speak simultaneously about their fears, feelings, and fantasies concerning the audience. A stream of words, laughs, some tears, and nonverbal sounds came from the performers. I couldn't pick up exactly what they were saying, but some barrier had begun to lower, and the effects of the "black hole" in the consciousness where Stanislavski locates the actor's perception of the audience began to come to light. Some fragments:

I tripped last night, and I thought I broke their bones. I gave them elbows in the eye, knees in the groin. I loved it.

First thing I do is take in the audience. Until I do that I think they are hostile. Then I look at them, and I see they want to be here.

I was so disappointed in the motel after our performance in Baltimore. The show was so good—and then all these people showing their droopy personalities! Why didn't they take off their clothes and fuck with us?

After more than twenty minutes of fantasizing Driver invited the Livingstons down to where the performers were. After a while talk began between the two groups. Some fragments:

PERF. I have fears the audience is on a power trip. I'm completely in your hands.

LIV. I'm on the other side hoping you like me. But I'm afraid your ability as an actor will manipulate me.

LIV. You know what's going to happen, and I don't. That makes me afraid—paranoia. I don't want to be made a fool of.

PERF. The Hog Farm has each person be King for a Day. Everyone takes off from there, plays the roles the King wants them to play.

LIV. I want you to act out your feelings—not alone—but while I act out mine.

PERF. I want the audience to act out in reaction to me. I want them to be completely submissive to the situation.

LIV. There are no feelings you have that I don't have.

LIV. I want you to enjoy what you're doing.

LIV. I feel like a piece of wood.

PERF. Why do you expect to be more alive here than in another theater?

LIV. The expectancy of it all makes me feel numb.

PERF. I want to take you with me.

Talk came around to "support" and "sitting in judgment." Driver saw a clear relationship between the two. People who literally sit watching are always sitting in judgment; but to support someone means to move to them, to touch them. Certain body states do not permit sitting in judgment. I thought there was an equation that read: quantity and intensity of rehearsal = support wanted from the audience by the performers. Joan looked at the Livingstons and asked them to support her. Driver suggested that she do something that needed support. She did the Clementine basket case, and three of the Livingstons lifted her off the floor and rocked her. She liked that, and they did, too. Driver said that when "the audience sits tight on its ass, its feelings are blocked, and there is nothing left for them to do but judge." Once the audience moves, its energies feed into the performance.

Jim Griffiths did a yoga tree, and no one helped him. He said he was glad no one helped him because helping him would have destroyed what he was trying to do. He asked how the audience could know when they were needed and when they weren't. Another performer spoke of how spectators felt betrayed by participation. "It's all right if you do something good one minute, but then you do something bad and no one knows how to signal the audience which is which." The Livingstons agreed.

I thought of *Commune* at Goucher College where students literally cradled the performer's heads in their hands during difficult moments and literally carried them through some scenes. When Lizzie was blindfolded looking for the El Dorado signs, spectators took her and led her from sign to sign. After the Father Jesus scene Clementine lies exhausted on the floor. Fearless asks that the audience touch her, and many of them do with extraordinary tenderness.

During most of the afternoon I was sitting on the overhang taking notes. A performer got very angry at me. "What really drops me out of performance is when Richard gets up"—the performer began dancing a parody of me—"and says, 'Go on, move, you can do it, we're pioneers, this is the new theater!' That really drops me out!" I was angry but stuffed it. A few minutes later Jim and Steve began talking to me about how I forced the issue of participation but didn't take any of the risks. Jim told me to come down from my perch and sit with the rest of them. Suddenly I got very angry at Steve (I don't remember what triggered it). He got angry back, and we shouted at each other.

At the height of our rage Driver told us to switch roles. I put

on Steve's T-shirt, and he took my notebook. Trading roles was amazing. For a few minutes I saw from his eyes, from the point of view of a performer who felt pushed, abandoned, and betrayed. I realized that the director has no right to make the performer do anything, no less "be open" to an audience. The whole problem took on a new, big dimension. I think Steve saw me from a new vantage, too, and recognized that I didn't have things all planned out in advance—I wasn't a general running his war games.

Nothing was resolved by Driver's workshop which began at 1:30 and ended at 5:00. For a few hours defenses were lowered, and we glimpsed something of what theater might be like with lessened hostility between audience and performers. But I also knew how long and difficult the road would be. Once again I was face to face not with the problems of theater alone, but with the problems of society.

Participation is legitimate only if it influences the tone and possibly the outcome of the performance; only if it changes the rhythms of the performance. Without this potential for change participation is just one more ornamental, illusionistic device: a treachery perpetrated on the audience while disguised as being on behalf of the audience.

Those who oppose participation or are threatened by it feel manipulated. "I don't want to be *forced against my will*!" is the interesting redundancy I've heard often. Being forced works directly on the body; "against my will" has a more subversive tone to it. Even those who oppose participation acknowledge its seductive qualities. According to Walter Kerr, for example:

The god Dionysus has appeared to his worshippers (all so like Euripides) to snap finger symbols and lift his skinny legs in rhythm beneath bushy hair, eyeglasses, and seedy mustache (not exactly like Euripides). The beat gets faster, some of the girls go topless, the garage spins, customers are cooed at: "Will you dance with me?"

I do not dance divinely. When it comes to dancing I am an up-tight person. . . . Obviously I need a breakthrough. But I am something of a realist and I am not wholly convinced that darting into the melee is going to make a dancer of me.¹¹

Kerr's description of the dancing in *Dionysus in 69* is of a seduction he has successfully not succumbed to. A forbidden

¹¹ Kerr's review of *Dionysus in 69*, New York Times, July 16, 1968, p. 1 ff.

sexual temptation is foresworn; the critic's honor is preserved. A critic's honor is proportionate to the distance he keeps between himself and the performance he is evaluating—is paid to evaluate.

What is it about participation that gives it such seductive and dangerous charm? Theater is traditionally the interplay of destinies, the actualizing of stories already completed by the author and rehearsed by the performers.¹² The performance is less dangerous than the processes that lead up to it. The logic of the play-in-performance is the "destiny" of tragedy and the "fortune" of comedy. Participation voids destiny and fortune, throwing drama back into its original theatrical uncertainty: re-introducing elements of the unrehearsed into the smooth ground of the performance. Things happen that are not "in the story" or "in the script." The audience is invited to put aside the role of witness and assume other, more active, roles. The characters of the story face the contingencies of the audience. The audience encounters the personalities of the performers unmediated by characterization. Thus on both sides the masks—the *personae*—are set aside. Participation doesn't eliminate the formalities of theater—it goes behind them to fetch private elements into the play. These two systems—the formal and the private—coexist, affecting each other. Illusions cherished, and needed, by orthodox theater-goers and practitioners are stripped away when the spectator and performer stand and say to each other, "I am, I do."

In 1969, toward the end of the *Dionysus* run, I formulated three rules of participation:

1. The audience is in a living space and a living situation. Things may happen to and with them as well as "in front" of them.
2. When a performer invites participation, he must be prepared to accept and deal with the spectator's reactions.
3. Participation should not be gratuitous.

In participatory situations game structure replaces aesthetics. Instead of events being worked out beforehand, there is a "game plan," a set of objectives, moves, and rules that are generally known or explained. The game plan is flexible, adapting to changing situations.

¹² Ponder the etymology of "rehearsal." It comes from the Old French *herce*, a harrow used to go over plowed land and break up clods, level the surface, and root up weeds: to smooth things out.

Several Greek tragedies, among them *Oedipus Tyrannus*, end with the banal choric injunction, "Count no man happy until the day of his death." Only when a life is over can others determine how it was lived: Destiny is applicable only to completed projects. Look at Oedipus, who thought himself the happiest of men. Oedipus uncovers his past, and in so doing, his present is changed. None of the events are secret; only the connections linking them are new. Jocasta is still Jocasta-wife, but she is now also Jocasta-mother. The man Oedipus murdered at the cross-roads is still a stubborn fellow, but he is now Laius-father. Antigone, Ismene, Polyneikes, Eteokles, are still Oedipus' children, but now they are also half-sisters and half-brothers. The curse on Oedipus is not simply that of murder and incest but of ignorance; and knowledge does not liberate him. His blindness is the ultimate ecstasy: a proper finish to a man doomed by self-knowledge. So, too, Lear's wheel of fire, Hamlet's flights of angels, and even Didi's:

Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? [...] Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (*He listens.*) But habit is a great deadener. (*He looks again at Estragon.*) At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on.

The heroes of drama are always gaining self-consciousness at the expense of everything else. Comic heroes celebrate a brief triumph over death. Participation injects these ancient themes directly into the structure of the performance. *The contingencies of life that are the traditional subjects of drama suddenly become its object.* Will the play go on? How? Will it complete itself? How? What is my place in it?

When there is participation, everyone in the theater tests destiny and gambles with fortune.

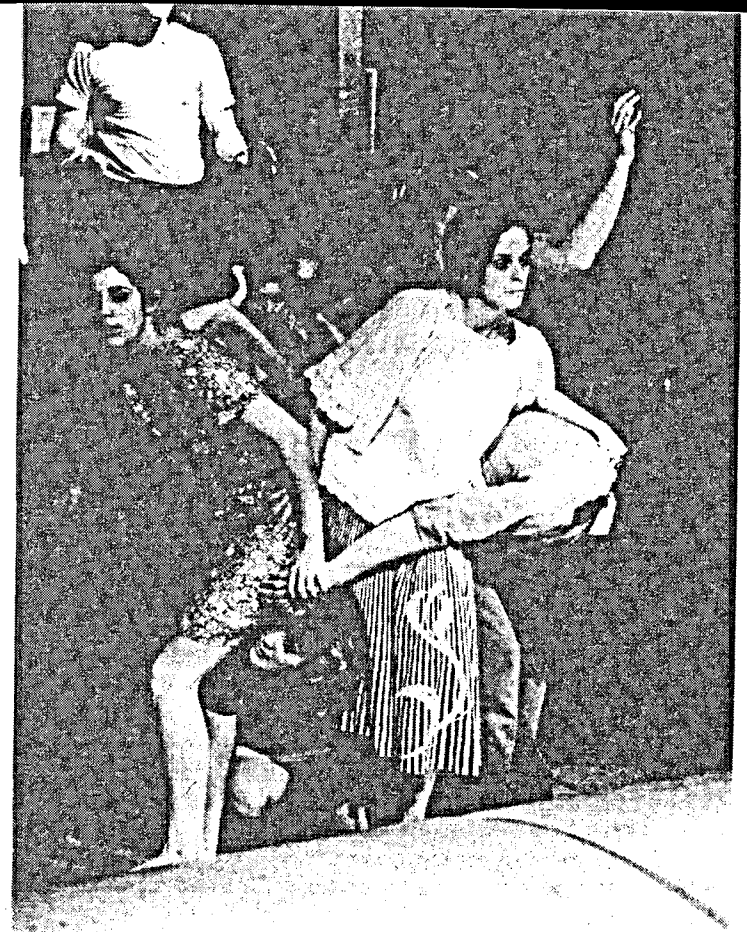
What is at stake is not the story being told but the telling of the story. In our mechanized theater this fundamental question has been pushed out of consciousness. Participation brings it back in. The play can stop, go on, go on in a new way. The performance is penetrated so that everyone can see it as a collaboration between performers and spectators, not a mechanical inevitability. In our days, when universal religious belief is gone and com-

munity solidarity rare, the wholeness of an Athenian or medieval audience is unattainable. A personal stake in one night's performance is not to be snickered at. Many attend "new theater" in the hope of taking part in a temporary community, in being invited to use responsivity instead of having to suppress it. To inject destiny, no matter how apparently trivial, back into theater restores danger, excitement, and vitality.

Sometimes participation doesn't need gross physical movement or role-playing. The Organism in *Commune* is a group of performers moving across the floor, up the Wave, and past a line on its crest marked INSIDE. They are enacting the approach of the Manson family to the Tate house. As they move, Spalding speaks from a pinnacle:

Did you ever see a coyote in the desert, tuned in, watching, completely aware? Christ on the Cross, the coyote in the desert, it's the same thing. The coyote's beautiful. He walks through the desert delicately. He smells every smell, he hears every sound, he sees everything. You see, he's always in a state of total paranoia, and total paranoia is total awareness.

As Spalding speaks of Christ, Bruce extends his body from the tub in a crucifixion pose: The Jesus People will take as one of their victims the image of Him they adore. But Bruce is also a jet-setter, a playboy lounging in his Hollywood bathtub-as-large-as-a-pool. While moving up the Wave, the Organism responds to every sound in the room. The Organism is the embodiment of "total paranoia = total awareness." Each sound elicits a move from the Organism. Loud sounds bring it to a frozen halt; a barrage of sounds and the Organism collapses in a heap. Only in silence will the Organism rise again and go on its way. Audiences learn that the Organism is negatively responsive to sound. Most people are quiet. But some spectators play with the Organism, testing the performers or intentionally stopping the play. People tap the floor, clap, cough, make rhythmic noises, whistle. The Organism collapses into its huddle. Some spectators urgently "shhhhh!" the others, who as often as not respond with more noise. Several waves of interaction ensue before the theater is finally quiet enough for the Organism to get over the line marked INSIDE. This silence is not the "natural" silence of an attentive audience; it is the earned, conscious silence of participation.



Photographs 18 and 19.
The Organism of *Commune*
begins to move up the Wave.
At its crest they see a vic-
tim: Bruce, the Playboy-
Christ lounging in his
Hollywood-baptismal pool.
(Frederick Eberstadt)



When *Commune* was performed in France during autumn, 1972, the play was restructured so that the murders occurred at the beginning; and then they are repeated again at the end. When the Organism began up the Wave the second time, at the end of the play, the audience knew what was going to happen. Twice the spectators made such insistent noise with such clarity of purpose, that the play was stopped, the murders not re-enacted. In this way the audience chose to change how *Commune* ended.

Objections and obstacles to audience participation can be summarized:

1. The rhythm of the performance is thrown off, maybe destroyed.
2. All participation is manipulative because the performers know things the audience does not.
3. A free-for-all such as what happened frequently at *Paradise Now* is neither art nor a party but a mess; and not in any way liberating.
4. Once the question "Who is boss?" is raised between performers and audience, nothing but hostility follows.
5. The audience comes to see a play and has the right to see a play. There can be no mixture of dramatic and participatory structures without confusion.
6. Neither the actor nor the spectator is trained to deal with participation.

Probably more objections could be added. They indicate that the root problem is with an aesthetics and the social system that are not built to accommodate participatory arts (or participatory politics, economics, education, or religion). To encourage participation is to demand changes in the social order—radical changes. From a strictly theatrical point of view these changes include:

1. Accepting random as well as prepared rhythms as artistically valid.
2. Finding times in the performance when the performers do not know any more than the audience. These are not improvised moments—where performers work freely from a set of objectives or rules—but truly open moments when all the people in the room acting either individually, in small groups, or in concert move the action forward. This "action"

is not necessarily known beforehand and may have nothing to do with the dramatic action of the play. This is the situation that developed on February 28.

3. Adaptation of a latticelike structure in which highly organized actions exist side by side with more open structures.

4. No forcing either the performers or the spectators. Some simple guides: Yield space and time; do not compete; if the play stops, let it stop, find out why, then decide whether it ought to resume, and how.

5. Do not mix dramatic and participatory structures but let them coexist in space and time.

6. Begin training performers to their additional jobs as "guide" and "host," and the spectators to their newly opened possibilities as people who can move, speak, act in the theater.

To accept these changes is to break the monopoly performers and directors hold over the means of production, particularly a monopoly on knowing what is going to happen next. Participation means openly acknowledging that the audience is the water in which the performers swim. Most of the time the audience is taken for granted. But when a spectator, or a group of spectators, makes a move, the performers ought to fall back, give over the space to the spectators: Let the majority rule. After all, the performance arises from the world of the spectators, it continues because of agreements made between spectators and performers, and when the play is over, the performance subsides back into the world of the spectators. A performance is a peak experience, not a separate experience.

Orthodox theater is mimetic: a reflection of prior experiences and an attempt to recreate them or give the illusion of recreating them. Psychodrama is entirely actual: the creation of circumstances in which the participants relive in the present troubling moments from their past. Environmental theater is neither mimetic nor psychodramatic. *The fundamental logic of environmental theater is not the logic of the story but the logic of story-telling.* Two groups of people agree to meet at a certain time and place. One group comes to witness a story, the other to tell a story. The story is of importance to both groups. For most of the performance time the agenda of story-telling is adhered to. But at any time the story can be set aside or advanced (told) in a different way. For most of the time the group witnessing the

story plays the bass line of the performance while the story-telling group plays the melody line. But these roles may be shared or reversed. The sharing and reversing is possible because of an assumption everyone makes: *Anything that happens in the theater during the performance time is part of the performance.* At Skidmore College in 1971, during a performance of *Commune*, some people burst into the room demanding that they be given the chance to sell their radical newspaper. The demand was agreed to—after an argument. The apparent interruption sheds light on what *Commune* is about. But even if the interruption has no identifiable link to the themes of the play, the interruption itself is wholesome: It shatters the authoritarian fix of orthodox theater.

To facilitate these changes it is necessary for the performer to be "himself" and not his "character" when he deals with a participating spectator. This opens up a wide range of possibilities. The performer may be angry, distressed, pleased by the interruption. The performer is a host, not a guardian; he is not responsible for the play's going on: That is a shared responsibility. This kind of participation through inclusion and giving over to circumstances is different from, but not incompatible with, the kind of participation known from Grotowski's early works, or from plays like *Dionysus in 69*.

Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater specializes in another kind of participation, closely related to what Kaprow has done. The B&P arrives at a place, and a general invitation is issued for people to help build the puppets and perform. Around a core of professionals Schumann arranges each performance with the assistance of many volunteers. These volunteers are, in a true sense, spectators who agree to participate in the show—they are spectators recruited into the performance. Instead of entering the performance while it is going on, they enter during a preparation phase. Usually these volunteers do not prolong their work with the B&P, they are not would-be professionals. Nor is the use of people in this way a version of amateur dramatics that is more accurately described as a hobby using the same people over and over again, many of whom harbor ambitions to become professionals. Schumann's practice is more like medieval theatrical celebrations. The skills of people in the community are called on to mount a spectacle for the benefit of the entire community. Again like medieval pageants and plays, Schumann's work is

often the celebration of a specific holiday, Christmas or Easter, or the response to a particular occasion: a peace march, protest, demonstration, or vigil.

In September, 1970, at Goddard College I saw an early version of the B&P's *Domestic Resurrection*. Many things about this outdoor spectacle were pleasing: the use of the quarter-mile-square meadow where the big B&P tent was raised; the slowness of the development of the action so that I could move around the big puppets, examine them from different angles, discover how they work. (Much recent experimenting by Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman has picked up on Schumann's work, attenuating the action in order to slow down time. The idea goes back at least to Andy Warhol's long, static movies; and to Cage's music. It is expressed in another field in Birdwhistell's analysis of movement made in frame by frame studies of films and in Alan Lomax's worldwide, cross-cultural study of movement. Film technology—the ability to speed up or slow down human movement, to come close to isolating phonemes and morphemes of gesture—has penetrated to the heart of theater. Speeding up and slowing down movement is characteristic of dreams, psychedelic experience, and dissociated states of consciousness. Thus the entire question of "pacing" now touches on mythological thought, psychosis, dreams, psychedelics, and various body poetics.)

For me the most effective scene of *Domestic Resurrection* was when B&P performers erected a twenty-five foot wooden mast, letting billow from it a vast blue and white sail. Then they unwound many yards of blue and white cloth, about three feet wide. With this band about fifteen of them formed the outline of a boat. The sail caught the brisk Vermont wind, and this veritable ark sailed across the meadow as the crowd of spectators parted like the waters to let it pass. The players chanted, "The storm is here! The storm is here!" They invited the audience to come aboard. Soon most of the several hundred spectators ducked under the bands of cloth and sailed along within the ark.

I admire the simplicity, strength, meaningfulness, and non-manipulative qualities of the scene. Each spectator is given a choice between staying outside or moving inside, between watching or doing, between the society that is going down or those who save themselves in order to start a new kind of world. No one is asked to "act" or do anything more extraordinary than play a little make-believe. And even if the point escapes you, it is fun to play along. That, finally, is the point.

I wonder if Schumann is aware of the parallel between the ark of *Domestic Resurrection* and a Tibetan festival play: "A boat is a wide band of brilliantly coloured cloth around a rectangular framework held up at the front and rear by oarsmen whose legs propel the boat in spurts while they paddle with long poles. The passengers walk in between the oarsmen."¹³

¹³ Duncan (1955), quoted in Southern (1961), 93-94.

I am interested in a theatre where everything is experienced for the first time, and I have stripped away all ties with conventional dance form. . . . I have come back to the ritualistic beginnings of art as a sharpened expression of life, extending every kind of perception. I want to participate in events of extreme authenticity, to involve people with their environment so that life is lived as a whole.
Ann Halprin

People want to know: Why do you worry about taking your clothes off when we have to wipe out imperialism?
Julian Beck

3 Nakedness

Nakedness = turning the inside out, or projecting onto the surfaces of the body events of the depths. Physiologically "interior events" of muscular, visceral, and mental significance are always altering the body's topography—from the slope of the shoulders to the rhythms of breath to the look in the eyes to the movement of the fingers or the curl of the lips: the body's surfaces are always changing in relation to interior body events. And vice versa, for the difference between *surface* and *depth* is not so easy to discern. From a simplistic point of view we know the inside from the outside. But from a dynamic point of view the two are interchangeable: The surfaces are the outermost aspects of the depths, and the depths are the hidden aspects of the surfaces. It is not as if two different realms were in communication but as if one realm were continually rearranging itself. The body lives in the midst of fluidity, movement, changes: surface to depth to skin to viscera to seen to hidden. . . .

Nakedness reverberates in apparently contradictory directions. A naked baby, a naked corpse, a naked person asleep. A naked prisoner running a gauntlet of truncheon-wielding concentration-camp guards. Dreams of being naked alone among a crowd of